

# ENABLING A LEARNING CONTINUUM: FROM STRONG FOUNDATION TO AN ASPIRATIONAL FUTURE

## Education Strategy (2026-2030)

### OUR STORY

Across diverse geographies and learning stages, DRF's education initiatives are shaping possibilities and transforming lives by building strong foundations for an aspirational future. Sunita (name changed), a grade 6 student from a government school in Andhra Pradesh, can now read fluently with comprehension and participate confidently in her other classes after completing a Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) program designed for children who lag age-appropriate learning levels. Disha (name changed), as an active member of her school's health club has adopted and promoting positive water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) behaviors in her school and at home. In a remote school in Himachal Pradesh, Rahul (name changed) experiences joy in learning through new study materials provided under need-based school infra support. Geeta (name changed), studying in Kallam Anji Reddy Vidyalaya (KARV) aspires to become an aeronautical engineer, while Bali (name changed), a student of the Kallam Anji Reddy Vocational Junior College (KAR-VJC) is preparing to join a prestigious self-managed team (SMT) program at Dr. Reddy's Laboratories after completion of her 2-year pharma technology course. Bhavika (name changed), an academically bright women is able to continue her studies at prestigious IIT Kanpur, and Komal Sharma (name changed), after completing her undergraduate studies at St. Stephen's College in Chemistry, went on to pursue DPhil in Organic Chemistry at Oxford University - both supported through a well-designed scholarship and mentorship program - for promoting STEM career for women.

Together, these stories reflect our enduring commitment to enabling a learning continuum - from building strong foundations to vocational and higher education - ensuring that every child and youth, irrespective of background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and realise their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup>In recognition of his contributions to the pharmaceutical industry and philanthropic activities, Dr. K Anji Reddy received several awards and honours, including the Padma Shri in 2001 and the Padma Bhushan in 2011.

Dr. Kallam Anji Reddy<sup>1</sup>, a visionary scientist, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, founded Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd. (DRL) in 1984 with a mission to make high-quality and affordable medicines accessible to people around the world. He firmly believed that businesses carried a deep responsibility towards society - a belief that inspired the establishment of Dr. Reddy's Foundation (DRF) in 1996. His vision was clear and human-centric: to empower children and disadvantaged youth through quality education and employability skills<sup>2</sup>, enabling them to realise their full potential and lead lives of dignity and purpose.

In its formative years, DRF engaged closely with marginalised communities in the then undivided state of Andhra Pradesh to understand ground realities and social challenges. These grassroots engagement led to the inception of the Child and Police Project in 1998, in partnership with the then undivided Andhra Pradesh State Police Department. The initiative sought to rescue children trapped in exploitative labour and support their reintegration into mainstream education through bridge schooling and linkage to government homes and schools.

In 2001, DRF established Kallam Anji Reddy Vidyalaya (KARV) at Chandanagar, Hyderabad, with the objective of improving access and quality of education for children from low-income families. Recognising that many KARV students were compelled to seek employment soon after completing grade 10 due to financial constraints - often without any formal vocational training - DRF founded the Kallam Anji Reddy Vocational Junior College (KAR-VJC) in 2003, adjacent to the KARV campus.

The KAR-VJC started offering two-year vocational courses for youth who have completed their secondary education, equipping them with market-aligned skills and improving their employability prospects. Together, KARV and KAR-VJC have transformed the lives of over 50,000 children and youth since its inception.

<sup>2</sup>DRF also runs placement-linked short-duration skill development programs which were launched in 1999. To date DRF has impacted more than 5 lakh youth and persons with disabilities under its flagship placement-linked skill development programs.

To extend its impact beyond its own institutions, DRF launched the School Improvement Program (SIP) in 2011, adopting government schools to strengthen the quality of education. Initially focused on improving school infrastructure, teaching aids, and teacher capacity, SIP gradually evolved into a holistic school transformation model. It introduced activity-based learning, smart science labs, spoken English and computer literacy, WASH initiatives, scholarships and sports. By 2022, SIP had reached over 200 government schools across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, positively impacting more than 3,00,000 children.

In 2018, DRF launched the SASHAKT Scholarship Program - an initiative to foster scientific temper and empower bright young women from low-income families to pursue STEM career. The program provides financial support for higher education in STEM and pairs scholars with senior women scientists who mentor them throughout their academic journey. This initiatives have supported over 250 young women, enabling them to pursue STEM education from top institutes from India to prepare themselves for a successful STEM career.

SIP program was further sharpened in 2022 and is now focusing on building foundational literacy & numeracy skills of government school children and promoting WASH practices through school health clubs.

In 2024, KARV got affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) with an aim to become one of the best affordable schools in the country.

Over the past three decades, DRF's mission has continually expanded - from education and skilling to youth employability (including persons with disabilities), regenerative agriculture, environment and primary healthcare strengthening. Although Dr. K. Anji Reddy passed away in 2013, his vision continues to guide DRF's journey. The enduring institutions he built<sup>3</sup> - anchored in compassion, innovation, and social responsibility - remain steadfast in advancing his mission to create a more equitable and inclusive society through transformative work in the areas of education, livelihoods, health, and the environment.

## EVOLUTION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

### The Beginning

India's independence marked the beginning of a transformative era in education policy. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution (1950) alluded that the State will strive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 within ten years of the Constitution's commencement. The government also established various commissions to address and evaluate the challenges in the Indian education system. (*Patel et al.*)

### Radhakrishnan, Mudaliar and Kothari Commissions

The first commission to be appointed was the University Education Commission/ Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49), which assessed the status of university education and proposed enhancements. Another important commission was the Secondary Education Commission/Mudaliar Commission (1952-53), which recommended suggestions on the objectives of secondary education and its relationship with primary and university education. Third Education Commission/Kothari Commission (1964-66) highlighted the importance of education for national development. It proposed a complete system reconstruction in three essential areas: (a) Internal transformation, (b) Qualitative improvement, and (c) Expansion of educational facilities. (*Patel et al.*)

### National Policy of Education, 1968

The recommendations made by the Education Commission served as the foundation for the first-ever national policy on education. In 1968, the government formulated the first National Policy on Education (NPE). This policy aimed to bring a comprehensive transformation, including programs such as 'free and compulsory education, development and protection of all the Indian languages, equality of educational opportunities.' (*Purohit 2018*). Additionally, it recommended spending 6% of India's national income on education (*Patel et al.*).

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd., Dr. Reddy's Foundation, Dr. Reddy's Foundation for Health Education

### **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), 1975**

Launched in 1975, ICDS is one of the world's largest and distinctive Early Childhood Development schemes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This scheme essentially operates through an Anganwadi Centre (AWC), focusing on the overall development of the children (aged 0-6) and strengthening the capability of the mother. The important services under ICDS include- nutritional and health support, immunisations, early childhood education, referral services, and health education. (MWCD 2015). India has now 1.4 million anganwadi centres operating across the country, reaching 23 million children, and serviced by around 2.4 million anganwadi workers and helpers.

### **42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act, 1976**

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act of 1976 brought about a critical change in the Indian constitution. It involved the transfer of the subject of 'Education' from the 'State List' to the 'Concurrent List.' The 'Concurrent List' includes subjects of mutual interest to both the Union and the States. This amendment was based on the recommendations of the Sardar Swaran Singh Committee. Consequently, the Parliament gained supremacy over State Assemblies in the enactment of laws related to education.

### **National Policy of Education (NPE), 1986**

In 1986, a new NPE was introduced. The policy emphasised providing education to the marginalised sections of society, universalising primary education, focusing on vocational education, adult education, and open schools (Patel et al.). The NPE was revised again in 1992 after the review of the Ramamurthi Review Committee (1990) and Janardhana Reddy Committee (1992). The committees made recommendations on aspects such as the common school system, early childhood care & education, and Navodaya Vidyalayas (George).

### **Mid-Day Meal Scheme, 1995**

The government introduced the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) to boost children's enrolment, retention, and attendance in 1995. Popularly known as the Mid-Day Meal

Scheme, it focused on improving the nutrition levels of children from grades 1-5. In 2007, the scheme was renamed 'National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools' and extended to children in grades 6-8. (PM POSHAN; MOE 2019)

### **Universalisation of Elementary Education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2001**

Another significant scheme was the SSA, launched in 2001-02. The primary goal of the scheme was to achieve universalisation of elementary education for children aged 6-14 by 2010 (Patel et al.). It prioritised addressing social, regional, and gender disparities and improving education quality (MHRD 2004).

### **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), 2009**

RMSA was introduced in 2009 with the goal of increasing the accessibility and enhancing the quality of secondary education. It aimed to raise the enrolment rates from 52.26 per cent in 2005-06 to 75 per cent by establishing accessible secondary schools.

Additional objectives of the scheme included elevating the quality of secondary education by ensuring compliance with the required standards, eliminating gender, socio-economic, and disability-related barriers, achieving universal access to secondary education by 2017, and attaining universal retention by 2020. (MOE 2021). From 2018, SSA and RMSA were subsumed under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (MOE 2023-24).

### **Right to Education Act (RTE), 2010**

An important development came into effect in 2010 with the RTE Act. This Act mandates that all children aged 6-14 have the right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school.

Furthermore, the Act states that all private schools must allocate 25 per cent of their seats to children from socially disadvantaged groups. Post the RTE Act, India joined the 135 countries that recognised education as a fundamental right for every child. (Patel et al.).

## ASSESSING THE PROGRESS MADE (1950 to 2025)

The education policies, recommendations of various committees, key schemes, and passing of the RTE Act aided in solving the problems of access and equity to a large extent for the Indian education system. This progress enabled India to make excellent progress in enrolment and equity across all levels of education.

In the domain of higher education, the establishment of prestigious institutions such as the first Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur in 1951 and the first Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Calcutta in 1961 served as a source of inspiration for a newly independent nation. India was determined to equip its populace with advanced technical skills and knowledge tailored to meet the demands of the era.

Post-independence, India's educational landscape commenced with a meagre count of approximately 2 lakh schools, which had expanded to more than 15 lakh schools by the close of 2020. Similar progress was made in higher education, with college numbers soaring from a mere 600 to over 45,000 in 2025, effectively catering to the needs of the vast and diverse population.

All the initial educational interventions helped improve India's literacy rate from only 18 per cent in 1950 to 80.9 per cent by 2024. The female literacy rate, which was in single digits post-independence, improved to 70 per cent by 2020.

India has made substantive progress in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary and upper primary levels, increasing from 43 per cent to 90.9 per cent and 13 per cent to 90.3 per cent respectively from 1950 to 2025. Similar improvements were made in the Gender Parity Index (GPI), Dropout Rate, and government investment in education, which increased from 0.64 per cent of the then Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1950 to 4.12 per cent of the GDP in 2022. **Table 1**, captures the progress made in key areas between 1950 and 2025.

**Table 1: Progress Made 1950-2025**

| Key Indicators  | 1950 | 1980 | 2000  | 2020   | 2025    |
|---|------|------|-------|--------|---------|
| <b>Literacy Rate (in %)</b>   |      |      |       |        |         |
| Overall   | 18.3 | 43.6 | 64.8  | 77.7   | **80.9  |
| Male  | 27.2 | 56.4 | 75.3  | 84.7   | **87.2  |
| Female  | 8.9  | 29.8 | 53.7  | 70.3   | **74.6  |
| <b>Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) (in %)</b>   |      |      |       |        |         |
| Primary   | 42.6 | 80.5 | 95.7  | 102.7  | 90.9    |
| Upper Primary   | 12.7 | 41.9 | 58.6  | 89.7   | 90.3    |
| Secondary   | NA   | NA   | NA    | 77.9   | 78.7    |
| Higher Secondary  | NA   | NA   | NA    | 51.4   | 58.4    |
| Higher Education  | NA   | NA   | NA    | 27.1   | 28.4*   |
| <b>Dropout Rate (in %)</b>  |      |      |       |        |         |
| Primary   | NA   | 58.7 | 40.7  | 1.5    | 0.3     |
| Upper Primary   | NA   | 72.7 | 53.7  | 2.6    | 3.5     |
| Secondary   | NA   | NA   | NA    | 16.1   | 11.5    |
| <b>Gender Parity Index (GPI)</b><br><i>(ratio of the number of female students enrolled to male students)</i>   |      |      |       |        |         |
| Primary   | 0.41 | 0.67 | 0.82  | 1.02   | 1.0     |
| Upper Primary   | 0.22 | 0.53 | 0.75  | 1.02   | 1.0     |
| Secondary   | NA   | NA   | NA    | 1      | 1.0     |
| Higher Secondary  | NA   | NA   | NA    | 1.04   | 1.1     |
| Higher Education  | NA   | NA   | NA    | 1.01   | 1.01*   |
| <b>Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)</b>  |      |      |       |        |         |
| Primary   | 24   | 38   | 43    | 26.5   | 20      |
| Upper Primary   | 20   | 33   | 38    | 18.5   | 17      |
| Secondary   | NA   | NA   | 31    | 18.5   | 15      |
| Higher Secondary  | 21   | 27   | 35    | 26.1   | 23      |
| Higher Education  | NA   | NA   | NA    | 28     | 26*     |
| <b>Recognised Educational Institutions</b>  |      |      |       |        |         |
| Primary (in hundreds)   | 2097 | 4945 | 6387  | 7788   | 7305    |
| Upper Primary (in hundreds)   | 136  | 1186 | 2063  | 4436   | 4340    |
| Secondary (in hundreds)   | NA   | NA   | 877   | 1514   | 1427    |
| Higher Secondary (in hundreds)  | 74   | 516  | 384   | 1337   | 1641    |
| College (in absolute numbers)   | 578  | 6963 | 10152 | 42343  | 45473*  |
| University (in absolute numbers)  | 27   | 110  | 254   | 1043   | 1168*   |
| <b>Public Expenditure on Education</b>  |      |      |       |        |         |
| Total Expenditure on Education (in Crore/INR)   | 64   | 3884 | 82486 | 863118 | 946972* |
| Expenditure on Education (% of GDP)   | 0.64 | 2.98 | 4.14  | 4.3    | 4.12*   |
| <p><b>Data Source:</b> Educational Statistics at a Glance (ESAG) 2018, UDISE 2019-20, UDISE 2021-22, UDISE 2022-23, UDISE 2023-24, UDISE 2024-25, AISHE 2019-20, AISHE 2021-22, ESAG 2014, Nath, IJFMR 2023, PRS Legislative Research - Demand for Grants 2022-23; PLFS 2023-24 Analysis Education. *These data points refer to year 2022. ** These data points is from PLFS 23-24 (new data points are not available yet)</p> <p><b>Notes:</b> GER greater than 100% might indicate the presence of over or under-age children in a particular level of education. For Pupil Teacher Ratio &amp; Recognised Educational Institutes, the figures for Higher Secondary level include Secondary for the years 1950 &amp; 1980. For literacy rate, the 1950 figures are for age group 5 and above. From 1980 and beyond, the figures are for age group 7 and above. For public expenditure on education, all figures include the expenditure by education department as well as other departments. The 2020 figures are based on the Revised Estimates of 2019-20.</p> |      |      |       |        |         |

In 2020, the Indian education system embarked on a new phase with the introduction of the forward-thinking National Education Policy (NEP). However, the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 put the execution plan on pause, as schools remained shut until August-September 2021, bringing forth a fresh set of challenges.

### Impact of COVID-19 on Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the learning of 1.6 billion children and youth worldwide (UNESCO 2022). In India, this number amounted to approximately 286 million students (pre-primary to upper secondary) (UNICEF India 2021). The school closures during the pandemic led to the entire education system operating in a remote learning format. Both central and state governments introduced several initiatives to facilitate home-based learning through mediums such as TV, community radio, podcasts, online platforms, apps, printed materials, and home visits by teachers and community volunteers (Bhushan et al. 2021).

A 2021 study by UNICEF revealed that WhatsApp emerged as the most widely used tool for remote learning. However, the study also highlighted that only 60 per cent of the students utilised remote learning resources. Within this group, 80 per cent of them stated that their learning was notably reduced compared to when they were in school. This decline was primarily attributed to a lack of access to devices and limited awareness of using them for remote learning.

The learning loss due to the pandemic has long-term economic costs both at the individual level (income loss) and the aggregate level (lower-skilled workforce is less productive) (Bhushan et al. 2021). Teachers faced the 'double dilemma' of revising the previous year's coursework or beginning the syllabus for the next year when school started reopening after around 18 months of extended closure (APU 2021). This also led to a delay in the execution of NEP by almost 2 years. For a detailed analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on education in India, please refer to **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Impact of Covid-19**

|   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.5 million schools closed<br/><i>(Central Square Foundation (CSF) 2021)</i></li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>286 million students impacted due to school closures (Pre-primary to Upper Secondary Education)<br/><i>(UNICEF India 2021)</i></li> </ul>  |
| Across Grades 2-6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>92% of the students lost at least one language ability</li> <li>82% of the students lost at least one mathematical ability<br/><i>(Azim Premji University (APU) 2021)</i></li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>33% of elementary students and 50% of secondary students reported poor or very poor mental and socio-emotional health<br/><i>(UNICEF 2021)</i></li> </ul>  |
| Learning at home during the pandemic (Class 3,5,8,10): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No digital device at home - 24%</li> <li>Learn better in school with peers' help - 80% Lot of time to learn new things - 78%</li> <li>Learning was joyful and fun - 45%</li> <li>Faced difficulty in learning - 38%</li> <li>No difference in learning, same as in school - 50%</li> <li>Burdensome, a lot of assignments - 78%<br/><i>(Data Source: NAS 2021)</i></li> </ul> |

### LAUNCH OF NEP 2020 FOR A FORWARD-LOOKING FUTURE

In July 2020, the government introduced the new NEP. The policy aimed to overhaul India's education system by focusing on holistic development, critical thinking, vocational skills, high-quality education, and transforming India into a 'global knowledge superpower.' It presents a comprehensive plan to reform and revamp the education system, aligning with the ambitious objectives of 21st-century education and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. (NEP 2020; TOI, Fathima 2022)

The NEP draws inspiration from India's rich traditions and focuses on making the education system interdisciplinary, flexible, equitable, and inclusive. It highlights how education needs to shift its focus from a content-driven approach to one that encourages problem-solving and creativity. (NEP 2020; TOI, Fathima 2022). The NEP 2020 has proposed multiple reforms for all levels of education across aspects such as pedagogy, teachers, curriculum, assessments, regulation, and investment in education. The new education system will adopt a 5+3+3+4 structure where the students will spend 5 years building their foundation,

followed by 3 years in the preparatory stage, another 3 years in the Middle stage and the remaining 4 years in the Secondary stage. NEP also envisaged the free and compulsory education to 3-18 years, covering this 5+3+3+4 structure. Furthermore, NEP discusses how education must contribute to the character development of learners while simultaneously preparing them for fulfilling employment opportunities. It also stresses the importance of research, technology innovation, and vocational education. (NEP 2020; TOI, Fathima 2022).

Despite the pandemic, notable progress has been made towards achieving key policy milestones, such as efforts to create awareness and garner interest among diverse stakeholders regarding the mission and vision of NEP. The government has rebranded the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) to the Ministry of Education (MOE) to better reflect the goals of the policy. (ORF, Sahoo 2021) Notwithstanding these initial advancements, the path towards achieving the vision outlined in the NEP is marked by formidable challenges. Some of the key challenges are summarised below.

## CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING NEP'S VISION

### Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Studies reveal that approximately 85 per cent of cumulative brain development occurs before the age of six (NEP 2020). However, India still faces a prominent challenge, with ICDS struggling to provide quality ECCE at scale (Ahluwalia et al. 2021). AWCs continue to be biggest provider of services in pre-primary age group in India. This substantially strains the AWC network, which is already overburdened with providing multiple services to mothers and young children. (ASER 2024) Furthermore, the existing preschool programs suffer from a dearth of developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogical practices, with over 80% of teachers in private preschools and Anganwadi workers lacking prior training (Ahluwalia et al. 2021). There is also a need to structure the roles and responsibilities between the Ministry of Women & Child Development and Ministry of Education to avoid duplication of efforts in ECCE interventions (CSF 2023).

Additionally, there is a lack of a robust data system for ECCE in India. The available data points are fragmented, inconsistent, incomplete, and sporadically compiled, making it difficult to visualise the long-term trend. (CSF 2022)

### Gross Enrolment Ratio and Dropout Rate at Secondary Level and Above

UDISE+ Report 2024-25 published by the MOE highlights that though dropout rates remain comparatively low at the primary level (0.3 per cent) and upper primary level (3.5 per cent), there is a significant concern at the secondary level, which has a higher dropout rate of 11.5 per cent. This trend is also reflected in the GER data, which registers high numbers at the elementary level (90.6 per cent). However, there is a notable decline of 11.9 percentage points at the secondary level from the elementary level and a further drop of 20.3 percentage points at the higher secondary level compared to the secondary level. The GER at the higher education level is also very low at 28.4 per cent, and a lot needs to be done if we want to achieve the NEP target of 50 per cent by 2035 (Table 3). Students from Socio- Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds are further susceptible to dropouts (NEP 2020).

**Table 3: Indicator Data Across Levels**

| Indicator                    | Primary | Upper Primary | Secondary | Higher Secondary | Higher Education |
|------------------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| Students enrolled (in crore) | 10.4    | 6.4           | 3.7       | 2.8              | 4.3              |
| GER- All Categories (in %)   | 90.9    | 90.3          | 78.7      | 58.4             | 28.4             |
| GER- SC (in %)               | 92.7    | 96.1          | 82        | 59.4             | 25.9             |
| GER- ST (in %)               | 98.8    | 99.5          | 81.3      | 51.9             | 21.2             |
| PTR (in ratio)               | 20      | 17            | 15        | 23               | 24               |
| GPI (in ratio)               | 1.00    | 1.00          | 1.00      | 1.10             | 1.01             |

**Notes:**

- The data source for all levels of school education is the UDISE+ Report 2024-25 (Existing Structure), for higher education AISHE Report 2021-22.
- These are the latest reports available on the MOE website.
- Abbreviations: Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), PTR (Pupil to Teacher Ratio), GPI (Gender Parity Index)

### Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

When addressing learning outcomes, a critical point is ensuring the development of solid FLN skills among children. FLN refers to the ability of a child to read with meaning, write, and solve basic math problems by the end of Grade 3. These skills act as a base for meaningful learning in higher grades and foster 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (*CBSE Academics*).

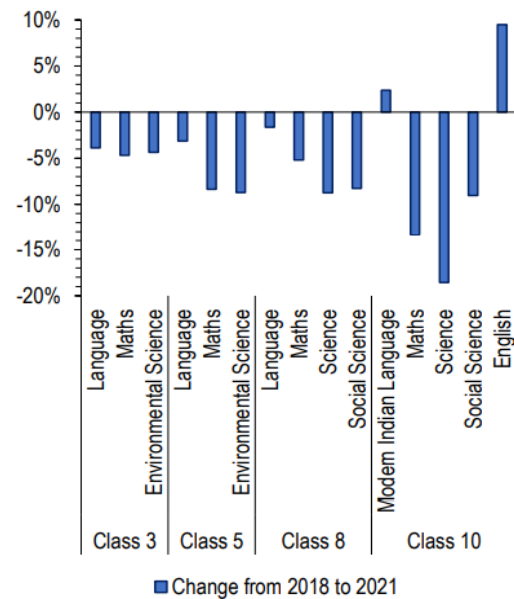
**Table 4** reveals further decline in the already low reading and arithmetic abilities from 2018-22, primarily due to the pandemic-enforced school closure. Notably, the decline in reading abilities is steeper than arithmetic abilities. The 2024 data show a recovery in reading, however, current reading levels are still lower than 2018. On the other hand, in arithmetic, there has not only been a rise from the post-pandemic levels but also an improvement from the 2018 levels.

| <b>Table 4: FLN Data for Grades 3,5,8</b>         |      |      |      |
|---|------|------|------|
| Indicator   | 2018 | 2022 | 2024 |
| <b>Reading (Regional language)</b>                |      |      |      |
| % of Grade 3 children who can read a Grade 2 text | 27.3 | 20.5 | 27.1 |
| % of Grade 5 children who can read a Grade 2 text | 50.5 | 42.8 | 48.8 |
| % of Grade 8 that can read basic text             | 73   | 69.6 | 71.1 |
| <b>Arithmetic</b>                                 |      |      |      |
| % of Grade 3 children can do subtraction          | 28.2 | 25.9 | 33.7 |
| % of Grade 5 children can do division             | 27.9 | 25.6 | 30.7 |
| % of Grade 8 children can do division             | 44.1 | 44.7 | 45.8 |

*Data Source: ASER 2024*

An important point to note is that the majority of the improvement in both reading and arithmetic has primarily been driven by the government schools. Data from the National Achievement Survey (NAS) - (**Figure 1**) - also shows that from 2018 to 2021, students' scores decreased across all subjects for all levels (class 3,5,8,10), except for two subjects in class 10. (*PRS 2023*) A 2021 study by Azim Premji University also revealed that across grades 2-6: (a) 92 per cent of public-school children

**Figure 1: Change (%) in All-India scores from NAS 2018 to 2021**



*Data Source PRS 2023*

have lost at least one specific language ability, and (b) 82 per cent of public-school children have lost at least one specific mathematical ability as compared to the previous year. This lack of a strong educational foundation hinders the student's success in their academic journey and professional endeavors. They fail to develop the competencies required to contribute to the economy and become active participants in society. (*The World Bank 2019*)

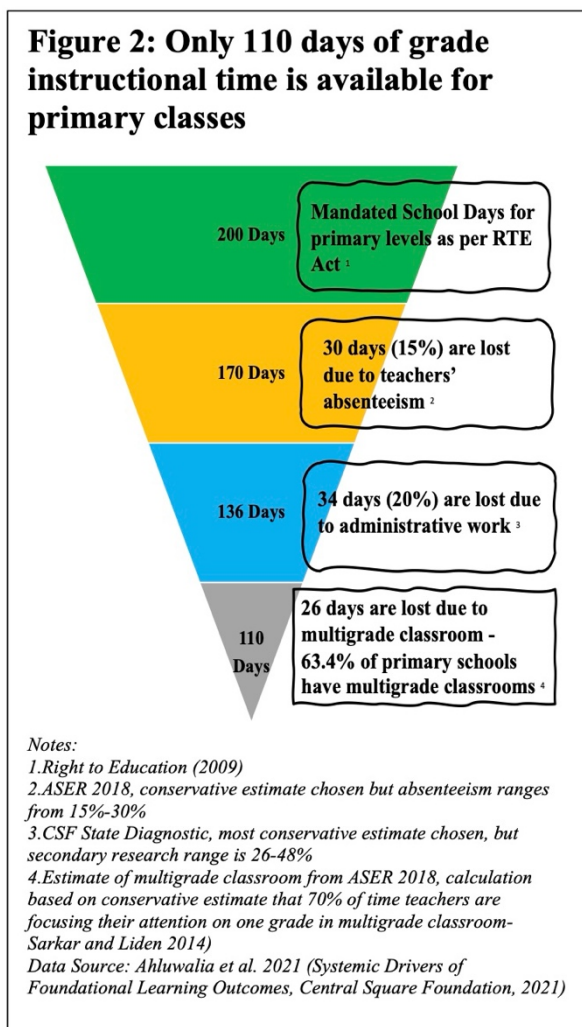
Students who fail to acquire the fundamental FLN skills face difficulties in catching up and might drop out of school. (*CBSE Academics*) It also impacts their acquisition of advanced skills and influences their grasp of concepts across subjects (*APU 2021*).

### Learning and Assessments

The prevailing education system relies heavily on traditional teaching and passive-learning methods, resulting in a lower emphasis on meaning-making and higher-order thinking skills (*Ahluwalia et al. 2021; Bhushan et al. 2020*).

A 2014 study by Sankar and Liden across 3 Indian states revealed that 70 per cent of the teaching time was spent on rote learning methods such as ‘reading aloud, recitation, copying from board or repeating.’ The use of monograde teaching methods in multigrade classrooms is another significant challenge. (Ahluwalia et al. 2021).

According to ASER 2024, more than 60 per cent of Grade 2 classrooms were observed to have students from other grades seated together. This situation necessitates teachers to put in further effort to accommodate the varying learning levels in these classrooms (Figure 2).



Another pressing issue is that the teachers focus on completing the prescribed syllabus and ensuring exam readiness instead of student mastery. This approach results in learning gaps, with many students falling behind. The lack of a

mother tongue-based medium of instruction in schools also leads to a learning disadvantage. The reasons for this could be the strong demand for English medium instruction from parents, lack of teacher training in multilingual instruction, and a dearth of quality instructional material in local languages. (Ahluwalia et al. 2021). Lastly, the current assessment structure is summative and primarily evaluates rote-learning and memorisation capabilities (NEP 2020). These linear assessment methods stifle the students' curiosity and prevent effective tracking of their learning progress.

### Teachers' Quality and Motivation

The current quality and motivation of teachers do not meet the desired standards due to numerous factors such as ‘quality of teacher education, recruitment, deployment, service conditions, and empowerment’. The Justice Verma Commission Report (2012) highlighted that the majority of the stand-alone Teacher Education Institutes are not fully engaged in meaningful teacher education but rather appear to be selling degrees for a price. (NEP 2020)

Furthermore, findings from the NAS 2021 Report Card reveal that 65 per cent of the teachers are overloaded with work. The lack of professional development and career progression opportunities also negatively impacts teachers' growth curve, which further impacts the overall learning outcomes at schools.

Additionally, studies show that teacher absenteeism hovers in the range of 15-30%, and teachers spend 20-42 per cent of their time on administrative duties. In 70 per cent of cases, teachers focus on teaching only one grade despite the presence of multigrade classrooms. These factors collectively reduce the instructional time available for teaching-learning activities (Figure 2). (Ahluwalia et al. 2021)

Shortage and vacancies of teachers is another major challenge. A study by Datta S. and Kingdon G. (2021) showed that 8 out of the 21 major Indian states faced a shortage of teachers in elementary schools based on RTE norms (Ahluwalia et al. 2021).

### School Infrastructure

The data in **Table 5** (ASER 2024) shows that a substantial percentage of schools still lack infrastructural facilities such as drinking water, girl's toilets, and library facilities. Digital infrastructure in schools is nascent, with no computers available for students in 72.6 per cent of schools. The added challenge is ensuring the available infrastructure's usability and maintenance. The data from NAS 2021 highlights the issue of space constraints, with 17 per cent of schools facing a lack of space in the classroom and 44 per cent of teachers reporting a lack of adequate workspace. Additionally, the infrastructure for Child with Special Needs (CWSN) requires attention, with only 33.4 per cent of schools having functional CWSN-friendly toilets and 54.9 per cent having ramps with handrail facilities<sup>4</sup> (UDISE+ Report 2024-25).

### Vocational Education

According to the 12th Five-Year Plan findings, less than 5 per cent of the Indian workforce (within the age bracket of 19-24) has received formal vocational education. It presents a stark contrast to countries such as the USA (52 per cent), Germany (75 per cent), and South Korea (96 per cent). The root of this disparity lies in the historical approach to vocational education in India, which primarily concentrated on higher secondary grades and dropouts from Grade 8 and beyond. Furthermore, students who completed Grades 11 and 12 with vocational subjects often encountered difficulties in finding clear pathways to pursue their chosen vocations at the higher education level. The entrance criteria for general higher education did not cater to these students, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their peers from conventional academic backgrounds. (NEP 2020)

UDISE+ Report 2023-24 also highlights that only 6.1 per cent of secondary and higher secondary schools offered vocational courses under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF).

**Table 5: School Infrastructural Facilities (in %) in 2024**

|                |  |             |
|----------------|--|-------------|
| Mid-day meal   | Mid-day meal served in school on day of visit  | 91.9        |
|                | Kitchen/shed for cooking mid-day meal  | 89.3        |
| Drinking water | No facility for drinking water   | 12.6        |
|                | <b>Facility but no drinking water available</b>  | 9.8         |
|                | Drinking water available   | 77.7        |
| Toilet         | No toilet facility   | 2.3         |
|                | <b>Facility but toilet not useable</b>   | <b>18.7</b> |
|                | Toilet useable   | 79.0        |
| Girls' Toilet  | No separate provision for girls' toilet  | 9.8         |
|                | <b>Separate provision but locked</b>   | <b>6.3</b>  |
|                | <b>Separate provision, unlocked but not useable</b>  | <b>12.0</b> |
|                | Separate provision, unlocked and useable   | 72.0        |
| Library        | No library   | 17.5        |
|                | <b>Library but no books being used by children on day of visit</b>                           | <b>31.2</b> |
|                | Library books being used by children on day of visit   | 51.3        |
| Electricity    | Electricity connection   | 95.9        |
|                | Of schools with electricity connection, % schools with electricity available on day of visit | 89.7        |
| Computer       | No computer is available for children to use   | 72.6        |
|                | <b>Computer available but not being used by children on day of visit</b>                     | <b>16.2</b> |
|                | Computer being used by children on the day of visit  | 11.1        |
| Sports         | Availability of playground in schools  | 66.2        |

Data Source: ASER 2024

Another major challenge stems from the perception that 'vocational education' is inferior to 'mainstream education.' (NEP 2020) NEP recommends the "integration of vocational education programs into mainstream education in all education institutions in a phased manner". Data from the ASER 2023 report reveals that the proportion of people aged 15-29 who have received formal vocation/technical training is only 3.4 per cent for rural areas and 7.2 per cent for urban areas.

<sup>4</sup> The regular ASER survey does not include data related to children with disabilities/special needs/ working children. Hence, we have taken data from the UDISE+ Report 2024-25

Various other challenges include a demand-supply mismatch in the job market, a lack of qualified vocational teachers, insufficient equipment, and an outdated curriculum that focuses on theoretical concepts (Joshi and Tripathi 2023; Pilz and Regel 2021).

### Higher Education

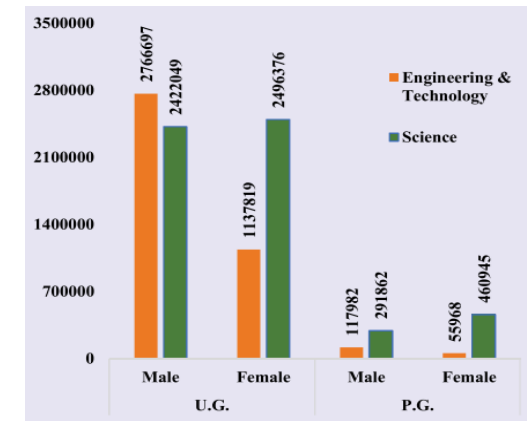
Our higher education system is grappling with several challenges, including: (a) a fragmented educational landscape, (b) neglect of cognitive growth and learning outcomes, (c) rigid and early specialisation barriers, (d) access and language barriers, (e) restricted autonomy to teachers and institutions, (f) stifled career advancement of faculty & leaders, and (g) governance, regulatory & standardisation related issues. (NEP 2020) Another critical challenge is the affordability of higher education. The expenditure includes academic fees and maintenance costs (books, stationery, transport, private tuition).

A 2022 report by the Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth, and Sports highlights that 'student financial aid schemes were not sufficient to cover the cost of higher education since 'most expenditure from the scholarship is towards course fees.' (PRS 2023) There is also a dearth of a rich research and innovation culture in HEIs. As of 2020-21, India spent only 0.64 per cent of its GDP on research and innovation, which is much lower than countries like the United States (3.5 per cent), Japan (3.3 per cent) and South Korea (4.8 per cent). (PRS 2024) The percentage of women researchers in science is meagre at 16.6 percent (MST 2022).

### Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Career for Women

The proportion of students enrolled in STEM at the higher education level is 25.6 per cent, with a gender-wise breakdown of 57.4 per cent males and 42.6 per cent females. The detailed gender-wise distribution of STEM enrolment is shown in **Figure 3**. We see that female enrolment has surpassed male enrolment in the Science stream at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, in the Engineering and Technology stream, the opposite trend is visible. (AISHE 2021-22)

**Figure 3: Gender-wise distribution of STEM Enrolment**



Data Source: AISHE Report 2021-22

In the case of women in STEM, the challenge is the low proportion of graduates who actually pursue STEM careers. According to insights shared by Swedish Science Counsellor Fannyvon Heland, India has the highest percentage of women STEM graduates globally, at 43 per cent. However, their representation in STEM jobs stands at only 14 per cent. These women face a range of issues including a scarcity of role models, societal expectations, pressures associated with marriage and childbirth, excessive burden of domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns during commute and in the workplace. (The Print, Agarwal 2021)

### State-wise Performance

State-wise performance variance in India is another crucial challenge. India has more than 50 approved state education boards, other than the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Apart from these, different international boards have also been incorporated into the Indian education system, such as Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) and the International Baccalaureate (IB). (COBSE). We can evaluate the performance of states in school education through the Performance Grading Index (PGI) developed by the MOE. PGI offers insights on factors contributing to performance and areas needing improvement (PGI, MOE 2023). The latest PGI 2.0 structure

consists of 73 indicators, with a total weightage of 1000 points, organised into 2 main categories - Outcomes and Governance management. Each of these categories is further subdivided into six domains, namely: (a) Learning Outcomes, (b) Access, (c) Infrastructure and Facilities, (d) Equity, (e) Governance Processes, and (f) Teacher Education and Training. (PGI 2.0: 2021-22, MOE 2023)

As illustrated in **Figure 4**, none of the states currently fall in the top 5 grades. The highest grade, designated as 'Prachesta - 2' (with a score

ranging from 641 to 700), has been achieved by Punjab and Chandigarh. For a more detailed view of the top-performing states in each of the six domains, please refer to **Table 6**. (PGI 2.0: 2021-22, MOE 2023)

**Table 6: Top Performing States in Education (domain wise)**

| Domain                       | Top Performing States |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Learning Outcomes            | Punjab                |
| Access                       | Delhi                 |
| Infrastructure & Facility    | Chandigarh            |
| Equity                       | Delhi                 |
| Governance Processes         | Gujarat               |
| Teacher Education & Training | Delhi                 |

*Data Source: PGI 2.0 2021-22, MOE 2023*

**Figure 4: Grades Attained by States/UTs in 2021-22**



| Grade Colour | Grade Name   | Grade Score | Number of States/UTs attaining the Grade |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|--|
|              | Daksh        | 941-1000    | NIL                                      |
|              | Utkarsh      | 881-940     | NIL                                      |
|              | Atti-Uttam   | 821-880     | NIL                                      |
|              | Uttam        | 761-820     | NIL                                      |
|              | Prachesta -1 | 701-760     | NIL                                      |
|              | Prachesta -2 | 641-700     | 2  |
|              | Prachesta -3 | 581-640     | 6  |
|              | Akanshi-1    | 521-580     | 13                                       |
|              | Akanshi-2    | 461-520     | 12                                       |
|              | Akanshi-3    | 401-460     | 3  |

*Data Source: PGI 2.0 2021-22, MOE 2023*

### Financing and Investment

Education Commission (1964-66) recommended spending 6 per cent of India's GDP on education. This target has been consistently upheld in various National Policies on Education, including the NEP 2020. (PRS 2024) The latest MoE report (2024) on the analysis of budgeted expenditure on education showed that the total expenditure<sup>5</sup> on education was approximately INR 9.46 lakh crore (Budget Estimate) in 2021-22. This accounts for about 4.1 per cent (in 2022) of the GDP, which is not only low compared to the Education Commission recommendation but also compared to developing countries like Bhutan (5.8 per cent in 2023) and South Africa (6.0 per cent in 2024) (The World Bank Data Bank).

In summary, India's education sector is encountering significant hurdles while implementing the NEP 2020, given the policy's immense scale and diversity. Transitioning from a rigid, memorization centered system to one that prioritises experiential learning and critical thinking demands a profound shift in attitudes involving educators, students, and parents alike. (ORF, Sahoo 2021) To fully realise the NEP 2020 vision, it is imperative to recognise and address these challenges, as they are pivotal to achieving the NEP's vision.

<sup>5</sup> Total expenditure on education in absolute and as a % of GDP includes the expenditure by the education department as well as the other departments

## ENABLING FACTORS TO ACHIEVE NEP'S VISION

The NEP 2020 is ambitious and progressive, aiming to transform the education system in alignment with the needs and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It strives to shift the focus of the Indian education system from 'sorting and selection' to 'human development', empowering all students to unlock their fullest potential (*Rise India 2021*). This shift is crucial for nurturing well-rounded, skilled, and future-ready children and youth who can contribute meaningfully to India's development. In addition to addressing the earlier-mentioned challenges, the following essential enabling factors will contribute to the successful implementation of the NEP:

### India's Demographic Dividend

India boasts a population of over 600 million individuals aged between 18 and 35 years, with approximately 65 per cent of the population falling below the age of 35. This demographic dividend is predicted to last until around 2055-56, reaching its highest point in 2041, when about 59 per cent of the population will be in the working-age bracket of 20 to 59 years. (*S&P Global, Malin and Tyagi 2023*) The NEP will play a pivotal role in providing the youth with the proper education and training, enabling them to become productive assets to the nation.

### Parent's Willingness to Invest

Though adequate funding and investment by the government is necessary for ensuring the Right to Education for all children, a positive sign in India is the willingness of parents to invest in their children's education. This commitment spans across different socio-economic strata, although the amount invested may vary.

A survey conducted by EdTech service provider Schoolnet revealed that, on average, parents in India spend INR 32,000 annually on their child's education. The spending varies across different tiers of cities, with families in Tier 1 cities spending an average of INR 43,000, while those in Tier 4 cities spending an average of INR 29,000 annually.

Additionally, parents spend an average of INR 16,000 annually on after-school education, including personal tutors, tuition, and coaching classes. (*India Today 2022*) The above trends indicate the growing awareness among parents regarding the importance of education and their willingness to invest in it to secure a better future for their children.

### Focus on FLN

To achieve universal FLN at the primary level, in line with NEP's vision, the government launched the 'National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy - NIPUN Bharat' in July 2021. This mission aims to ensure that every child attains FLN at the end of grade 3 and not later than grade 5 by 2026- 2027. It concentrates on five main areas: (a) ensuring access and retention of children in foundational years of schooling, (b) teacher capacity building, (c) creating high-quality learning resources for both children and teachers, (d) tracking children's learning outcomes, and v) addressing children's health and nutrition needs, including mental well-being. (*MOE Annual Report 2021-22*)

The data from ASER 2024 shows that 83 per cent of schools had received a directive to implement FLN activities from the government, and at least one teacher had been trained on FLN in 78 per cent of the schools. In the Education Working Meetings of G20 2023 India, FLN was identified as a priority sector, and a seminar on ensuring FLN in the context of blended learning was conducted (*G20 2023 India Press Release*).

Furthermore, NEP proposed SAFAL (Structured Assessment for Analysing Learning) for measuring learning outcomes and providing development feedback to schools (*SAFAL, CBSE*). It also envisioned the creation of a National Assessment Centre - PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) as a standard-setting body under MHRD. Other than government, efforts from private sector organisations working in education will also be required to strengthen the NIPUN Bharat Mission and contribute to the vision of NEP on foundational learning.

### **Global Focus on Ending Learning Poverty**

The World Bank introduced the concept of learning poverty in its 2019 report in coordination with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Learning poverty is defined as ‘being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10’. This report is significant as it aligned countries to strive towards one standard indicator. The report also discusses how, contrary to the general notion, dynamic changes in technology or society will further increase the importance of strong foundational skills.

In 2022, the World Bank published an update report highlighting the amplified learning crisis post-pandemic. The report recommended ‘political commitment at the national level’ as the immediate step towards learning recovery and acceleration. It also discussed the importance of introducing structural reforms and proposed the RAPID<sup>4</sup> framework. In 2023, UNICEF and Hempel Foundation launched the Foundation Learning Action Tracker (FLAT) to monitor the progress of low and middle-income countries in implementing the RAPID framework for foundational learning. The knowledge and measures shared in this report have created an enabling environment for accelerating the work on FLN skills.

### **Technological Advancements**

The advancement in digital technologies can play a catalytic role in facilitating the implementation of NEP 2020. Recent technical breakthroughs such as Generative Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and the Internet of Things have the potential to reach the remotest corners of India and bridge the digital divide. Technology at large can not only make learning personalised and interactive but also enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing (TOI, Jain 2023). The government has introduced a multitude of initiatives in the Ed-tech space, such as the National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT), Virtual Labs, the National

Digital Library of India (NDLI), the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), and PM e-Vidya, along with institutional mechanisms like the proposed National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) (MOE Annual Report 2023-24).

### **NGOs and Community Involvement in the Implementation of Education Initiatives**

The history of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community involvement in education in India is rooted in the collective endeavor to improve educational outcomes and ensure equitable access to education, particularly in the underprivileged areas. The ‘innovative’ and ‘community-oriented’ approach of NGOs places them in a distinctive position to effectively tackle the diverse challenges of this sector. Currently, more than 32,000 registered NGOs in India have been actively involved in addressing educational challenges, particularly in states with higher vulnerability. Community involvement has also been recognised as a means to enhance the transparency and efficiency of the education system. This community involvement, which includes the participation of parents, local bodies, and civil society organisations, creates a conducive environment for realising the vision of NEP 2020. The active collaboration among NGOs, the government, local communities and private sector paves the way for a holistic approach to education reform. (Give 2023)

### **Setting up of the National Research Foundation (NRF)**

A quality research and innovation ecosystem is essential to position India as a leading knowledge society. To accomplish this goal, the NEP recommended setting up the NRF. In June 2023, the Union Cabinet approved a budget of INR 50,000 crore for five years for the establishment of NRF (MST 2023). NRF, now operating under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023, will aim to catalyse the culture of research in universities through measures such as: (a) funding competitive, peer-reviewed grant proposals; (b) nurturing research at institutions where it is in its infancy; (c) connecting the researchers with the government and industry; and d) recognising exceptional research contributions (NEP 2020; MST 2025).

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<sup>4</sup> 5 elements of RAPID: Reach every child and keep them in school; Assess learning levels regularly; Prioritise teaching the fundamentals; Increase the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning; Develop psychological health and well-being

## Global Focus on Achieving Women Participation in STEM

The 2020 World Bank Report titled ‘The Equality Equation: Advancing the Participation of Women and Girls in STEM’ explores the global gender gaps in STEM. It reveals that the problem lies not in women’s enrolment levels and test scores. It is the stereotypes and biases that exist in the form of perceptions regarding who possesses talent in STEM/capability to work in STEM that undermine their participation. To combat the above, the report recommends various measures such as (a) addressing gender biases in educational materials; (b) engaging parents; (c) promoting STEM-based extracurricular activities; (d) highlighting female role models; and (f) collaborating with the private sector for hiring more women in STEM jobs.

India currently has the highest percentage of women STEM graduates (43 per cent) in the world as compared to countries like the US (34 per cent), the UK (38 per cent) and Germany (28 per cent) (*The World Bank- Gender Data Portal 2025*). We need to focus on harnessing this potential.

## Global Focus on Achieving SDGs

The United Nations (UN) SDGs consist of a comprehensive set of 17 goals encompassing 169 targets, which all 193 UN Member states have committed to pursuing by 2030 (UN). India has demonstrated a strong commitment to realising these SDGs, with particular emphasis on SDG4, which revolves around ensuring access to high-quality education.

This commitment to quality education is not only a standalone objective but also a critical prerequisite for attaining other SDGs. Quality education plays a vital role in shielding individuals from poverty (SDG1), eradicating hunger (SDG2), promoting good health and well-being (SDG3), advancing gender equality (SDG5), facilitating decent employment, thereby driving economic growth (SDG8) and diminishing inequalities (SDG10). India's commitment to the SDGs resonates seamlessly with the vision of the NEP. By prioritising quality education and emphasising its role as an enabler of holistic development, India not only contributes to the global agenda of sustainable development but also lays the foundation for realising NEP's transformative goals within the country.

## DRF EDUCATION STRATEGY

In response to the evolving challenges and emerging opportunities in the education landscape - and in alignment with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) - Dr. Reddy’s Foundation (DRF) has formulated its Education Strategy. This strategy serves as a guiding compass to direct our collective efforts towards strengthening the learning continuum and providing mentoring support that enables students from low-income communities to access the right career opportunities.

While DRF acknowledges the broad range of critical interventions emphasized in the NEP, the Foundation has chosen to focus its time, energy, and resources on three priority areas where it can create the most meaningful and scalable impact: (a) Strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy; (FLN) among children who are at risk of being left behind; (b) Developing an affordable school model that delivers high-quality education and effective career mentoring to prepare students for future opportunities; and (c) Empowering bright young women from underserved backgrounds to pursue STEM education and careers, thereby fostering transformative changes in their lives and communities. In essence, the strategy can be summarised as: *“Enabling the learning continuum of students from low-income families by building strong FLN skills, providing appropriate career guidance for a brighter future, and supporting young women to pursue STEM education and careers through a segmented approach.”*

The overarching purpose of this strategy is twofold: First, to enable DRF to make a substantive contribution towards realizing the aspirations of the NEP and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and second, to establish a clear and coherent framework that guides and aligns DRF’s future education initiatives. This Education Strategy is organised into three key sections: (1) Principles - the core beliefs that shape and guide our approach; (2) Strategic Priorities - the central focus areas driving our educational interventions; and (3) Strategic Components - the actionable pathways through which this strategy will be operationalised.

### 1. PRINCIPLES

The following eight key principles will guide all our education work:

**1.1 Equity Focus:** Our primary focus is on children, girl and young women from low income families.

**1.2 Community-Centered Approach:** We will prioritise the active involvement of

communities, school staff, and all relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of our work.

- 1.3 Inclusion and Diversity:** We will embrace diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of our work, fostering an environment where all children, CWSN, and women can thrive and succeed.
- 1.4 Collective Problem Inquiry Approach:** We will follow a collective problem inquiry approach to rigorously test novel ideas, employing a minimum viable product approach to design effective solutions.
- 1.5 Leveraging Technology:** We will harness the power of technology to enhance our solution design, optimise service delivery, and effectively measure the outcomes of our educational initiatives.
- 1.6 Data-Driven Decision Making:** We are committed to rigorously measuring and evaluating program outcomes, basing our decisions on data-driven insights and best practices.
- 1.7 Continuous Learning and Improvement:** We are committed to a continuous learning and improvement culture, regularly seeking feedback and refining our practices to enhance the effectiveness of our education initiatives.
- 1.8 Partnership and Collaboration:** We will actively cultivate partnerships with organisations, institutions, and stakeholders to leverage collective strengths and resources.

## 2. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### 2.1 Promoting Children's Health:

Ensuring the well-being of school-going children is fundamental, as their physical and mental health directly influences learning levels, attendance, and academic performance. Schools play a critical role in early identification of health concerns and in promoting lifelong healthy habits. We will prioritise strengthening school health system by promoting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices and

connecting students with nearby primary health centres (PHCs) for regular screenings, timely referrals, and access to primary health care services.

- 2.2 Building Strong Foundational Skills:** We will focus on developing robust Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) skills, especially in the child's mother tongue, as these competencies form the bedrock of all future learning. Our efforts will include children with special needs (CWSN), ensuring equity in early learning. In addition, we will strengthen English Language (EL) proficiency, recognising its growing importance in higher education, global communication, and employability. Together, FLN&EL will empower children to build a strong academic base and progress confidently through their educational journey.

### 2.3 Guiding and Supporting Career

**Pathways:** To ensure students are future-ready, we will invest in systems and processes that help identify students' aspirations, interests, and strengths early on. Based on this assessment, we will provide structured career guidance and mentoring support, enabling students to pursue pathways aligned with their potential. This approach will help students-particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds-make informed decisions and access appropriate opportunities in education, skilling, or employment.

### 2.4 Inculcating Environment-Friendly

**Practices:** Environmental sustainability is an essential life competency for the next generation. We will integrate practical and age-appropriate environmental education into the school ecosystem to inculcate responsible behaviours from an early age. By making children aware of the importance of sustainability, we aim to influence not only their individual choices but also the broader practices within their households and communities. This will help nurture environmentally conscious citizens who can contribute to long-term ecological well-being.

### 2.5 Supporting Bright Young Women for STEM

**Careers:** Increasing the participation of women in STEM fields is critical for promoting gender equity

and tapping into a large pool of underutilised talent. We will continue to support bright young women from low-income backgrounds through targeted scholarships, structured mentoring, and career support to help them pursue STEM education and careers.

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*As part of DRF's strategic focus, we have chosen **NOT TO DO** the following:*

- (a) Increasing Teachers' Administrative Burden:** *We will refrain from designing interventions and systems that further burden teachers with administrative tasks, ensuring they can focus on effective teaching.*
  - (b) Technology Integration without Infrastructure and Training:** *We will not introduce technology without providing the necessary infrastructure and adequate training for both teachers and students to maximise its benefits.*
  - (c) Non-Aligned Curriculum:** *Our strategy avoids the introduction of specialised curricula that do not align with the mandates of respective Boards or the priorities of the NEP.*
  - (d) Promoting Rote Learning:** *We actively discourage rote learning and, instead, emphasise interactive and critical thinking-based learning approaches to foster holistic development.*
  - (e) Neglecting Local Context and Culture:** *We do not neglect the rich diversity of local contexts and cultures and recognise their importance in shaping effective educational practices.*
  - (f) Neglecting Vernacular Languages:** *We prioritise the inclusion and promotion of vernacular languages and acknowledge their pivotal role in preserving cultural heritage and facilitating learning.*
- 

## STRATEGY COMPONENTS (SC)

### SC 1: ENABLING CHILDREN FOR FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

#### Intervention Objective

To develop a scalable model that enables children to acquire foundational learning skills, preventing them from falling behind and ensuring their successful participation in future education

#### Key Strategic Components

- Identification of government schools which need support on Foundational Literacy, Numeracy and English Language (FLN&EL) in partnership with District Education Officers
- Discussion with the school Headmaster and school Teachers to align them with the proposed intervention and create a sense of ownership for it
- Conducting a baseline study at the beginning of the academic year to know the FLN&EL status
- Training and capacity building of Resource Persons (RPs) to ensure that they are equipped with right skills to deliver FLN&EL to students
- Designing effective pedagogy and related content for quality delivery
- RPs to provide support for FLN and EL in their assigned schools
- Ensuring the availability of training materials, including assistive technology for CWSN
- Continuous monitoring and regular concurrent assessments to ensure quality execution of the intervention
- An endline assessment to measure the progress made
- Incorporating the learnings from the assessment insights in the intervention design
- Documenting our pedagogy on FLN&EL and sharing with the larger ecosystem

### SC 2: BUILDING AFFORDABLE HIGH-QUALITY PRIVATE EDUCATION MODEL

**Program Objective:** To establish Kallam Anji Redday Vidyalaya (KARV) as one of the best affordable schools in the country, widely recognised for its stellar academic excellence, experiential learning environment, and holistic development of students.

#### Key Strategic Components:

- Focus on stellar academic performance by incorporating age-appropriate affective pedagogy and concept-based assessment on FLN&EL and core subjects

- Ensuring quality teachers hiring and their regular capacity building
- Ensuring the availability of quality and inclusive school infrastructure and its regular maintenance
- Integrating vocational courses as a core aspect of the schooling system, as per the NEP focus
- Promoting good health and environment-friendly practices for the holistic development of students
- Train all teachers to identify CWSN and implement differentiated teaching pedagogy
- Facilitate grade wise parent orientation session to provide clarity on academic expectations, students development and parental support needed

### SC 3: BUILD A CAREER COUNSELLING, MENTORING, AND SUPPORT MODEL FOR HIGHER SECONDARY CHILDREN

**Program Objective:** To enable informed and aspirational career choices among students, DRF will develop and implement a structured career counselling, mentoring, and support model for higher secondary students at KARV. Through this component, DRF aims to bridge the information and aspiration gap, ensuring that every student - irrespective of their socio-economic background - can make confident, well-informed decisions for a brighter and successful career.

#### Key Strategic Components

- Helping students through personalised career counselling to identify their strengths, interests, and potential career options through structured assessments and interactive sessions
- Connecting students with trained mentors and professionals who can guide them through academic, emotional, and career-related decisions
- Leveraging technology platforms to ensure equitable access to information, resources, and continuous career guidance
- Providing right academic support to help them prepare well for the qualifying examination

### SC 4: SUPPORTING BRIGHT YOUNG WOMEN FROM LOW- INCOME FAMILIES FOR STEM CAREERS

**Program Objective:** To promote the participation of bright young women from low-income families in STEM education and careers through a well- designed scholarship-cum-mentorship program to bring transformative changes

#### Key Strategic Components

- Reaching out to top colleges and schools
- Counselling and selection based on students meeting the defined scholarship criteria (low-income families, bright women interested in STEM, preferably first-generation learners)
- Scholarship will be provided undergraduate STEM courses (for top Indian colleges) and top online STEM courses
- All selected students will get mentorship support during their study phase, enabling them to pursue further studies and careers in STEM

### SC 5: PROMOTING GOOD HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY PRACTICES AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

#### Program Objective

To inculcate the importance of good health and environment-friendly practices among school children through school health clubs

#### Key Strategic Components

- Formation of health clubs in the intervention schools with the support of school staff
- Developing quality modules on WASH and Sustainable Practices
- Conducting Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions for RPs to provide training to school health club members
- Developing processes and systems for the long-term sustainability of school health clubs
- Providing regular guidance along with monitoring the planned activities of the school health clubs to ensure they actively promote WASH and Environment-friendly practices
- Connecting schools with the nearest PHCs for proper health screenings and access to comprehensive primary health care services

## PARTNERSHIP

We firmly believe that this Education Strategy will serve as a catalyst for building meaningful partnerships with the public education system as well as with corporate CSR initiatives and philanthropic foundations that share a common vision of enabling a holistic learning continuum.

These collaborations will focus on three key areas: (a) strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) among children who are at risk of being left behind (b) enhancing quality education, mentoring, and career guidance to prepare students for successful futures; and (c) supporting bright young women through a comprehensive scholarship-cum-mentorship programme that empowers them to pursue careers in STEM fields.

Through such partnerships, DRF aims to mobilise and leverage collective resources, knowledge, and expertise to drive scalable, sustainable, and transformative impact in the education ecosystem.

## SYSTEM ENGAGEMENT

We will deepen our role as an ecosystem partner by working closely with state governments and national bodies on initiatives of national or state importance that align with our areas of strength and ground-level experience.

We will actively engage with system level initiatives focused on improving FLN outcomes in government schools. Further, we will work with the Governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to strengthen FLN&EL skills for primary grade students by sharing a well-designed pedagogy, initial handholding and teachers' capacity building support to enhance classroom practices on building FLN&EL skills,

We will also support state-led reforms in assessments and examinations, helping shift the system away from rote memorisation towards assessments that prioritise conceptual understanding, application of knowledge, problem-solving, comprehension, communication, and logical reasoning.

Our Sashakt scholarship which is fully aligned with emerging national priorities of supporting bright young women to pursue STEM education, thereby contributing to India's long-term talent and gender equity goals; we will explore scaling similar models to promote STEM education to large number of women from emerging quality online undergrad programs.

Additionally, we will also engage with national and state level initiatives to integrate vocational and career counselling services especially to create skilling pathways<sup>5</sup> for secondary and higher secondary students, with a main focus on rural women.

## CONCLUSION

In alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, DRF's Education Strategy seeks to strengthen the education ecosystem through need-based technical support, demonstration of scalable models, and knowledge sharing drawn from on-ground implementation and learnings. DRF recognises that the path to educational transformation lies in fostering a learning continuum—one that enables children and aspiring young women from underprivileged backgrounds to meaningfully participate in education, the economy, and society at large.

Through this strategy, DRF aims to reach and positively impact approximately 2.5 lakh children and aspiring young women by 2030. A mid-term strategy review will be undertaken in December 2028 to: (a) assess progress made towards the strategy's goals; (b) take stock of ecosystem-level changes and their implications; and (c) integrate new insights and learnings to refine and strengthen the approach going forward.

We believe that our Education Strategy is deeply rooted in the vision of our founder, Dr. K. Anji Reddy, and represents his commitment to giving back to society by contributing to the education system meaningfully.

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<sup>5</sup> DRF has a separate 'Youth Skilling Strategy' and 'Person with Disability Skilling Strategy'

**ABBREVIATIONS USED:**

ABC: Academic Bank of Credit  
ASER: Annual Status of Education Report  
CBSE: Central Board of Secondary Education  
CWSN: Children with Special Need  
DRF: Dr. Reddy's Foundation  
DRL: Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Limited  
ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)  
FLAT: Foundational Learning Action Tracker  
FLN&EL: Foundational Literacy, Numeracy and English Language  
GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
GER: Gross Enrolment Ratio  
ICSD: Integrated Child Development Services  
IIT: Indian Institute of Technology  
ITI: Industrial Training Institute  
KARV: Kallam Anji Reddy Vidyalaya  
KARVJC: Kallam Anji Reddy Vocational Junior College  
FLN: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy  
MoE: Ministry of Education  
MHRD: Ministry of Human Resource and Development  
MWCD: Ministry of Women and Child Development  
NAS: National Achievement Survey (NAS)  
NGO: Non-Government Organization  
NPE: National Policy of Education  
NEP: National Education Policy  
NDLI: National Digital Library of India  
NETF: National Educational Technology Forum  
NIPUN: National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy  
NMEICT: National Mission on Education through ICT  
NP-NSPE: National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education  
NRF: National Research Foundation  
PARAKH: Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development  
PHC: Primary Health Centre  
RTE: Right to Education  
RMSA: Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)  
SAFAL: Structured Assessment for Analysing Learning  
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals  
SSA: Sarva Siksha Abhiyan  
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering Mathematics  
UDISE+: Unified District Information System for Education Plus  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund  
USD: United States Dollar  
WSH: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

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At Dr. Reddy's Foundation we develop and test innovative solutions to address complex social problems and leverage partnerships to scale up impact. Over the years DRF has directly impacted more than 2 million lives through improved education, health, livelihood and climate action outcomes.

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