

# **Examination of the Effect of Pandemic on the Education System of India through the Lens of Indian Budget**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is of prime importance for not only the individual development but also for the overall development of the nation. India has ranked 132 out of 191 countries across the globe in United Nation's Human

Development Index.<sup>1</sup> Education has been accorded a high priority in development policies of India since Independence. Public financing of education depends on the budget and policy framework for education. The analysis done by the “*Kothari Commission (1964)*” reveals the need for allocation of funds for education sector. The recommendation of the Commission was that 6% of the Gross domestic Product per year should be taken as the total public expenditure on education and minimum 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the same is required to be allocated for prioritizing education at school level.<sup>2</sup> This recommendation was further reiterated by the many other committees namely “*Saikia Committee (1997)*, *Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999)* and *CABE Committee (2005)*”, which opined the need for more resources to attain universalization of elementary education, achieve standard quality education at all levels and more focus on learning outcomes. India’s challenge is to provide quality education for all, by ensuring adequate resource allocation and public financing, which can turn this demographic dividend to the advantage of the country. There is an immediate urgency to devise effective policies which take advantage of the demographic dividend with maximum young population. The major reason for unemployment and social upheaval is nothing but the lack of opportunities provided to the youth.<sup>3</sup>

Acquiring education is a vital aspect of everyone’s life without which the life seems to be incomplete. It enables individual to acquire knowledge, skills, moral values, and ethics. Everyone strives to give best education to their young ones which will ensure a better future to them. So far as India is concerned the demand for education from the elementary level till the tertiary level is being growing. But there exist huge disparities so far access to education is concerned and this is because of the inefficiency of the concerned authorities in imparting education that is ensured by Article 21A of the Constitution. Article 21A of the Constitution of India enumerates that “*the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine*”. The 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment of 2002 have added Article 21A to the Constitution of India which deals with right to education.<sup>4</sup> Prior to inclusion of Article 21A it was under the DPSP where it was distributed in two Articles namely Article 45 and Article 39(f) which says that state should ensure equitable and accessible education. It was only after 1993 when one of the landmark decisions of Supreme Court i.e., *Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh*<sup>5</sup> which change its position. In *Unnikrishnan’s*<sup>6</sup> case it was held that “*right to education is a part of right to life under Article 21*”. The case brought the essential idea of right to education to the limelight and further made the legislators to think

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<sup>1</sup> “India ranks 132 among 191 countries in UN human development index,” *cnbctv18.com*, 2022available at: <https://www.cnbctv18.com/india/india-ranks-132-among-191-countries-in-un-human-development-index-14683811.htm> (last visited September 14, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> “On Allocating 6 Per Cent of GDP to Education,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 7–8 (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Dr Nagaraj V Gudaganavar, Dr Rajashri and S Gudaganavar, “Demographic Dividend-Its Implications to India” 5 (2014).

<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of India, 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment 2002.

<sup>5</sup> *Unnikrishnan JP v. State of Andhra Pradesh* 1993 SCC (1) 645.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

about the importance of education. Thereafter a committee named as “*Tapas Majumdar Committee*” was set up in 1999 which recommended the insertion of Article 21A as right to education to Part-III of the Constitution.<sup>7</sup>

Right to education has been deeply affected because of the Pandemic which we are presently facing. Because of the COVID 19 situation which is prevailing all around the globe the education system is deeply affected. Children are not getting proper knowledge about the subject which they deserve to get from the education system. Presently to get education and become literate is a far fetch dream for those who are poor and living in inaccessible regions of the country. The COVID-19 challenge already seemed daunting from a financing perspective. In early 2020, a staggering \$148 billion was estimated to be required to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) which ensures quality education.<sup>8</sup> It affects approximately 32 million students in India, which includes 15.8 million females and 16.2 million males.<sup>9</sup> An estimated value of 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries around the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, causing the catastrophic damage in education systems in the history of the world.<sup>10</sup>

Although we are taking the help of virtual platform to share the knowledge with the student, but the major question is “*whether it is fruitfully substituting the physical classroom teaching or not?*” Internet connection has now days have become a dream for those poor children or children who are residing in inaccessible area to get connected to the education system. So, authors in the research paper would be identifying the issues which the student is facing for accruing the knowledge during the pandemic and post-pandemic phase.

### **BUDGETARY ALLOCATION FOR EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA**

The rising difference between budget allocation and budget implementation has led to doubt, insecurity in the minds of the people, questioning the government on their very motive towards the advancement of the educational sector. During the pandemic, the education sector suffered the most since it was the first to be shut and consequently the last be opened. Education was hampered all over the world, but India was the one country affected the maximum because of its lackadaisical and blinkered approach to the importance of this sector. Lack of resources, limited funding and problem of underutilization not only harmed the future of the youth but also derailed India from overall economic development.

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<sup>7</sup> Government of India "Note For Group of Ministers" (MHRD).

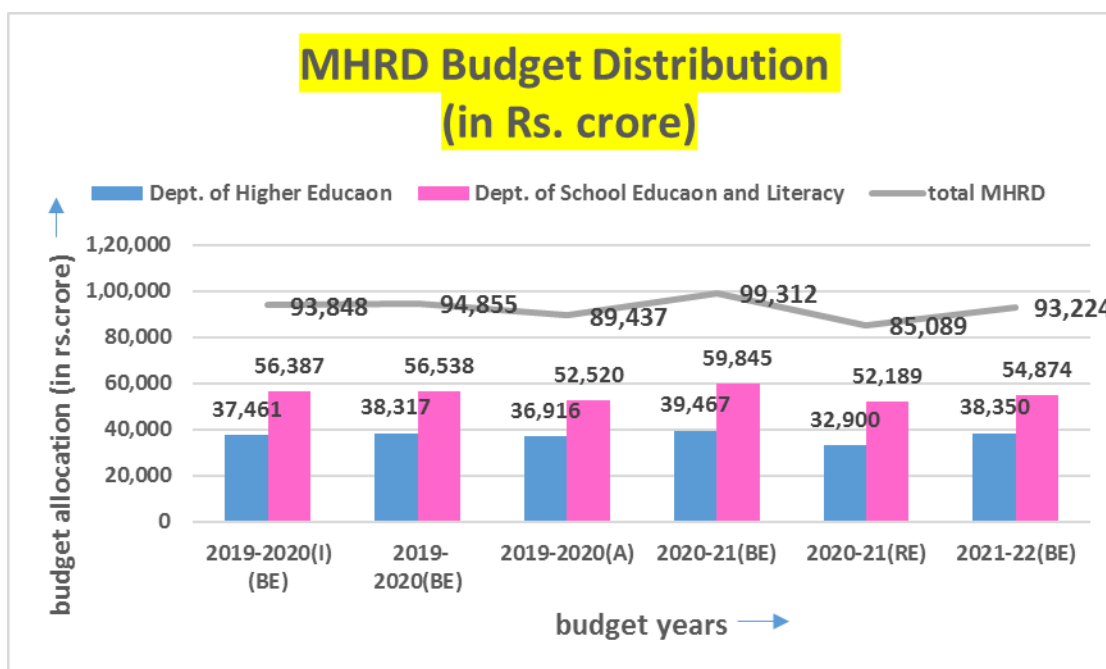
<sup>8</sup> “Impacts of COVID-19 on Sustainable Development Goals and effective approaches to maneuver them in the post-pandemic environment | SpringerLink,” *available at*: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11356-021-17793-9> (last visited September 14, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> “COVID-19 Crisis Will Push Millions of Vulnerable Children Into Child Labour,” *available at*: <https://thewire.in/rights/covid-19-crisis-will-push-millions-of-vulnerable-children-into-child-labour> (last visited September 14, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> “UNSDG | Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond,” *available at*: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-education-during-covid-19-and-beyond>, <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-education-during-covid-19-and-beyond> (last visited September 12, 2022).

The “*Right to Education 2009*” seemed to provide compulsory and free education for children above the age of 6 years to 14 years in order to help them complete full elementary education, however, as per the “*National Sample Survey (NSS)*” 75<sup>th</sup> Round data estimates, an average Indian parent spends Rs.3545 on primary education and Rs.3953 per annum on upper primary education of their children out of his pocket in 2017-18.<sup>11</sup> The “*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*” which is an essential tool for delivering the Right to Education, was redesigned to comply with the Right to Education Act. However, the new framework lacked resources and financial funding. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (hereinafter referred as MHRD) commitments are left unfilled by the Ministry of Finance (hereinafter referred as MOF) evidentially as only 50% of the proposed outlay gets allocated for SSA by the union government. For instance, in the year 2017-18 (BE), MHRD claimed to fund Rs.55000 crores but the budgetary allocation by the MOF was only Rs.23,500 crores (46.7%) towards SSA.<sup>12</sup> Implementation, financing and strengthening of the educational ecosystem is the only way to achieve the developmental goals of India and stand in par with the other international laws and conventions that it is a signatory of.

This paper in this part analysis the priorities in the union budget of the years 2019, 2020, 2021 on both public expenditure and resource mobilization taking into considerations COVID-19 pandemic and consequent developments.



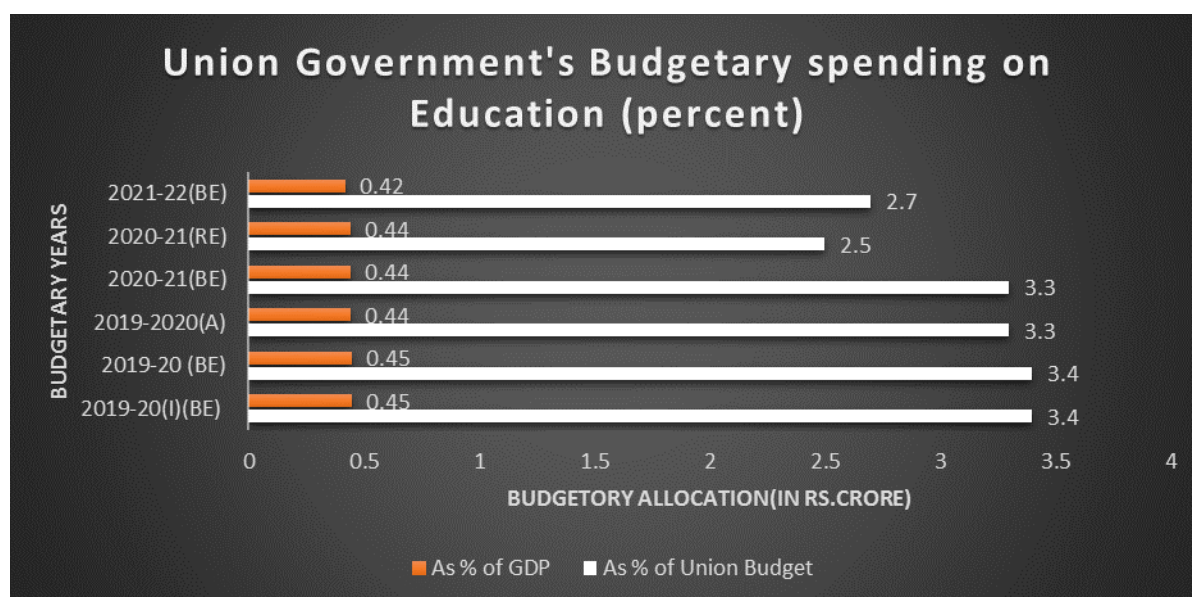
<sup>11</sup> “Summary analysis of NSS Report No.585: Household Social Consumption on Education in India NSS 75th Round (July 2017-June 2018) | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government of India,” available at: <http://164.100.161.63/announcements/summary-analysis-nss-report-no585-household-social-consumption-education-india-nss> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Jatinder S. Bedi, *Policy Impacts on Qualitative and Quantitative Aspects of Indian Education: Special Emphasis on Punjab* (Springer, 2018).

*Figure.1*

The above Figure shows the amount of allocation made by the MHRD towards the two categories of education. It is undoubtedly concerning that the Budget Estimate (BE) and Revised Estimate (RE) for the year 2021 have decreased by 14223 (14%), when there should have been a strong focus placed on revitalizing this sector considering the significant damage inflicted by COVID 19. It is seen that the combined spending of both the Union and the State had risen to 8.8% of the GDP in 2020-21. However, it is saddening that even noticing a rise in the contribution, it is not even close to what many developing countries put in their education sector for its growth. SSA, being the primary government scheme for inclusive school education, has remained severely underfunded since the inception of the scheme. In the year 2020-2021 (BE), the funding for the scheme was at INR 38,750 crores which although was a 7 per cent increase over 2019-20 (BE), was considerably short of the demanded amount by the ministry by about 16 per cent. Such gaps severely damage the prospects of quality education for the 63.44% of the youth in India. The overall resources towards school education needs to be increased, by focusing on the fair implementation of the NEP, and backing it with adequate fund.

*The major issue is with the absorption of the budgetary resources allotted and effective utilization of available funds.* This is because the government is more focused in dreaming for quality education without inducing and backing it with sufficient funding and quality human resources. Even though there is a hike in the allocation for the year 2021-22 (BE) (Fig.1), however there is a significant continuous dip in the percent of GDP i.e., from 0.45 in the year 2019-20 (BE) (Fig. 2) it got drop to 0.42 in the year 2021-22 (BE). This trend raises serious concerns in achieving the goal of 6% GDP by 2030 for education sector.



*Figure-2*

As seen from the Union Budget of the three years; the Union Government's Budgetary Spending on Education has been continuously declining. (Fig. 2) Even though amount of allocation towards education has increased over the years but as percentage of total Union Budget utilization has fallen significantly. This proves that the government has prioritized other sectors except education sector.

The budget does not inspire confidence towards the education sector. To ensure quality education for Indian students by 2030, *the government should adequately invest resources to address the issues of poor of infrastructure, poor quality of teachers (professionally) resulting in shortage of human resource and building teacher training institutions.* However, the scenario is daunting. According to MHRD report More than five lakh elementary school teachers<sup>13</sup> are needed, and there are currently 1,05,630 schools of the same nature are present across the nation that only have one teacher, with Madhya Pradesh having the greatest number (17,874 institutions) of single teacher schools.<sup>14</sup> The budget fails to provide allocation for trained teachers. Twenty percent of teacher in government aided schools are inefficient in teaching due to lack of training.<sup>15</sup> The government has miserably failed to recognize the need of teachers training through the statistical data and continues to ignore the direct correlation of teachers training with that of quality of education by constantly neglecting the need for its betterment.

The infrastructure requirements, which has a direct link in providing high learning outcomes, according to the RTE demands, the basic infrastructure needs include having a bare minimum of at least one classroom per teacher, adequate clean and healthy drinking water facility for all children and teachers, and security for all in the school, all of which has failed drastically. The above scenario is far-fetched considering the insufficient funding to provide for the successful implementation of the RTE legislation. It has been deliberated by the 15th Finance Commission report, the requirement for allocation of fund for growth of the education sector and proposed an incentive of Rs.4800 crores to the states, for enhanced Educational Outcomes in the next four years period.<sup>16</sup> It was reported that to make the public sector education system more sustainable, the Budget provisions have to take up such recommendations or else the accomplishment of the goals of NEP and attainment of 6% GDP would become a distant dream. However, despite revamping and implementing the recommendations, the government in the budget of 2021 has showcased its interest on infrastructural

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<sup>13</sup> "India faces shortage of five lakh teachers | Business Standard News," available at: [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-faces-shortage-of-five-lakh-teachers-115032500893\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-faces-shortage-of-five-lakh-teachers-115032500893_1.html) (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> "Over 1 lakh schools in India have just 1 teacher - Times of India," available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/over-1-lakh-schools-in-india-have-just-1-teacher/articleshow/53608274.cms> (last visited September 14, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> "Deteriorating Quality of Education in Schools : Are Teachers Responsible? | Economic and Political Weekly," available at: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/24/special-articles/deteriorating-quality-education-schools.html> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> "The Report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission," available at: <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1693868> (last visited September 12, 2022).

development by allocating Rs.5.54 Lakh crores and attracting foreign investments.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, several measures are proposed for project financing, including the introduction of an infrastructure debt fund. There is substantial increase in funding towards other sectors whereas the education sector remained untouched.

Not only is this sector receiving high priorities with the significant increase in budgetary allocation (35% over Financial Year 2020) and introduction of several new projects, but also witnessing high demanded proposals for incentivizing execution. Other economic sectors like oil & gas industries, aerospace, Automotive industries, power & Mining industries, banking, capital markets, NBFC, ARC, FPI's, real estates, IFSC's are flooded with funding and incentives.<sup>18</sup> With the government inclination towards more of the commercial sector, the education system of India will suffer tremendously. Thus, there is need for the state and the Union to step up their budgetary support for the education sector to ensure organic and inclusive development for aspirational India.

### **A VISION OF REFORM IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PHASE**

The Ministry of Education, has been allotted Rs.1,04,277 crores for the FY 2022-23, which has been noted as an increase of 18.5% over the FY 2021-22 revised expenditure.<sup>19</sup> The department of higher education has received 39% of the total allocation and the department of school education and literacy has received 61% of the ministry fund<sup>20</sup>, in contrast to last year funding of 51,970 towards school education and literacy and 36,032 towards higher education.<sup>21</sup> Even though, India fell short of the 6% of GDP spending goal set forth in the National Education Policies of 1968 and 2020.<sup>22</sup> Post COVID pandemic there was urgent need of revamping the education sector and boosting it with extra funding as fuel to compensate the destruction caused over the lost last 2 and a half year of lockdown, however, the only ray of light India saw in the budget speech of 2022-23

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<sup>17</sup> "Union Budget 21-22 provided capital outlay of Rs. 5.54 lakh crore, an increase of 34.5% over Budget Estimate of FY 2020-21, to boost economy after COVID-19 pandemic," available at: <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1778566> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> "Reviving India's Growth, Union Budget 2021-22 | PWC," available at: <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/budget/2021/reviving-indias-growth.pdf> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> "Demand for Grants 2022-23 Analysis : Education," available at: <https://prsindia.org/budgets/parliament/demand-for-grants-2022-23-analysis-education> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "Budget Speech 2022-23 | Government of India," available at: [https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/Budget\\_Speech.pdf](https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/Budget_Speech.pdf) (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> "National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development," available at: [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf) (last visited September 12, 2022).

was a hike of 11%<sup>23</sup> in country's education sector which is 3% of the GDP<sup>24</sup> as compared to 5-6 % public investment/ GDP in education in countries like USA, UK, and South Africa.<sup>25</sup>

The budget of 2022-2023 fails miserably towards covering the learning loss during pandemic. Education was prioritized in the budget speech for 2022–2023 in a few small ways, such as the start of “*PM E-Vidya's one class, one TV channel*” initiative and the focus on digital learning via TVs, which increased from 20 to 200 television channels. The government, however, miserably failed to acknowledge that possession of television sets or other electronic gadgets are scarce in rural areas and that leaning through television cannot substitute classroom teaching in entirety especially with reopening of the educational institutions. This can be substantiated by significant underfunding towards the teacher training, school infrastructure especially in rural areas, marked by a drastic reduction from 250 crores to 127 crores in 2022-23.<sup>26</sup> This drop highly affects the dream of securing quality education to the children under the RTE and NEP legislations. The government has failed to remedy the long-lasting issues of poor infrastructure and problem of quality education in the rural India. The funds allocated towards PM e Vidya initiative under the digital India e-learning programme, has seen drastic reduction to 421.01 crores in 2022-23 from 645.61 crores in 2021-22<sup>27</sup>. This demonstrates that, even after the pandemic, public investment from the federal government and the state as a whole in the education sector has lagged behind that of other business sectors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Indian educational system has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and it has revealed the latent defects of the education system that has been prevailing since long and it made the nation realize the need for strengthening the education infrastructure to have a conducive education ecosystem for everyone. It had switched from a physical style of instruction to an online or virtual one. The process of imparting education through online medium has its own advantages and disadvantages. Although this turns to be the best way to continue the learning process by keeping yourself safe but for some children it's a far fetching dream of acquiring knowledge. Acquiring knowledge through an online mode is impossible for children who are not financially sound to purchase the digital gadgets. Additionally, students who live in rural areas without access to

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<sup>23</sup> Livemint, “PM Modi to highlight Budget 2022's positive impact on education sector today | *Mint* 2022,” available at: <https://www.livemint.com/education/news/pm-modi-to-highlight-budget-2022-s-positive-impact-on-education-sector-today-11645412843204.html> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> “Chapter 10: Social Infrastructure, Employment, and Human Development”, Economic Survey, 2021-22, Ministry of Finance,” available at: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/doc/eschapter/echap10.pdf> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> “Education schemes hit a fund hurdle | *Deccan Herald*,” available at: <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/in-perspective/education-schemes-hit-a-fund-hurdle-1097372.html> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> “Budget 2022 Education Sector: FM Nirmala Sitharaman Budget 2022-23 for Education not in line with National Education Policy (NEP), Edtech Sector,” available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/budget-2022-fails-to-focus-on-reducing-learning-gaps-caused-amid-covid-allocations-not-in-line-with-nep-2020-experts-7755013/> (last visited September 12, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.



energy or network connectivity are denied the opportunity to receive an education online. Also, to address their needs the government have not taken any initiatives from their side apart from creating online platform. But in some places, the teachers have started innovative way of imparting education to the rural children.<sup>28</sup> Although, the government for the time being is unable to create infrastructure to support the online education but the government can develop the infrastructure for any future pandemic situations. With the above illustrations, it is indeed proved that it is the government which has access to the economic endowments of the country and therefore should be held responsible to provide financial help and assistance for the downtrodden. Such assistance cannot be demanded from the private bodies who work on profit motives solely. There is an urgent need for tangible provisions to help curb this problem from the grassroots levels. Further, the education system of India is being continuously ignored by the government, which is depicted from the budgetary allocation towards the education. Also, an underutilization of the allocated budget by the concerned department of the government has further contributed towards negative growth of the education system.

Inclusiveness has been the linchpins of India's development agenda. India being a developing country, having resource crunch all time, there is a need to optimize the expenditure on education to promote overall educational growth. With India having the demographic upper hand, investing in education sector will help advancing and realizing the hidden potential of a buoyant economy in the future.

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<sup>28</sup> "So what if these students don't own smartphones, house walls enough to impart lessons : The Tribune India," *available at*: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/schools/so-what-if-these-students-dont-own-smartphones-house-walls-enough-to-impart-lessons-131154> (last visited September 12, 2022).