

# **The Privatisation of Indian Education: Challenges & Solutions, with Special Reference to the Primary Education System**

ANANYA KAUSHIK DASH<sup>1</sup>, PADMANABH MISHRA<sup>2</sup> AND  
LOIS HANNA MARKOSE<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>B.A. (Hons) English, <sup>2</sup>B.A. (Hons) Political Science, University of Delhi

## **Abstract**

This research paper aims to examine the education sector of India, especially after an attempt has been made to privatise education in recent years. In essence, the process of privatisation i.e., when any sector or market goes from publicly owned to privately owned, has increased in recent years as a higher number of private schools & other educational institutions- including those for higher education, have emerged, leading to a sectoral shift away from the initial public/government-funded education institutions- providing education to students at an affordable price, to more expensive private institutions, which are often unaffordable for economically and socially deprived sections of the society. This paper aims to find out if (and how) privatisation has affected different segments of society and the contemporary realities of India's education system, now increasingly witnessing privatized education at a premium cost. Moreover, it highlights a brief history of the privatisation trends in India and how they fare with respect to newer educational policies such as the National Education Policy. Lastly, it explores the viability of studying in a public institution in the current era, considering that the standard of education provided is lower than in private schools, as well as provides feasible solutions to aid India's ailing education sector.

*Keywords: privatisation, Indian education, public-private, school education*

## **Introduction**

One of the most important words or perhaps, one of the greatest phenomena to occur after capitalism is the rise of privatisation, which has only intensified across various sectors in the last two centuries. While the modern usage of the term in an economic sense is attributed to Peter Drucker (Drucker, 1969), the original mention of the same in academic literature is observed in the works surrounding the analysis of economic policy in Germany under the rule of the National Socialist Party in the 1930s and early 1940s (Bel, 2006). The term 'privatisation' later became popular in Europe and then spread to the Global South (Kwaghe, 2020).

Privatisation refers to the transfer of ownership and control of government or state assets, firms and operations to private investors. This transfer takes the form of the issue and sale or outright distribution of shares to the general public. Broadly used, the term privatization includes other policies such as "contracting out" that is, the process by which activities, while publicly organized and financed, are carried out by private sector companies, e.g., street cleaning, garbage collection, housing, and education (OECD, 2003).

This transfer of ownership of property usually occurs from the public sphere (wherein it can be used/accessed indiscriminately by everyone) to the private sphere such that its utility or access is now restricted to the new owner. Another way of using the term 'privatisation' is when private entities establish, grow and sustain themselves in an economy over time on such a scale that public entities are outnumbered by the former, leading to a more private presence in the market. Herein, a perfect example of a public good (read service) is public healthcare infrastructure existing in a country, which is owned, controlled and maintained by the government across various levels & locations, and is generally available to all individuals- regardless of their background, at affordable rates, with the sole aim of advocating social welfare by providing healthcare services to citizens which would otherwise not have been possible due to an array of reasons. In the context of this example, the process of privatisation would happen when government hospitals would be shut down altogether or sold to a private entity for better functioning & governance, or when a large number of private hospitals would open in the same location, providing [better] healthcare services to people, although at higher costs perhaps.

In the context of education, the term privatization relates to many different educational programs and policies. It is a process which can be defined as the transfer of activities, assets and responsibility from government, public institutions and organizations in the education sector to private individuals and agencies (Abrol, 2016).

Historically, India's education system has tried to maintain the spirit of the 'Right to Education', which states free & compulsory education is provided by the State to children aged 6-14 years (Singh, 2021). Primary and secondary have seen massive success over the last few decades with enrolment rates touching as high as 96% along with a more than 50% increase in the number of enrolled female students, improving the gender gap in India's schools (for more information, see Appendices A & B). While primary & secondary levels have their own set of challenges, they have fared largely well in comparison to the higher secondary levels which have been plagued by issues like quality of education, accessibility & affordability for students, lack of skill development, etc. Regarding the domain of higher education, traditionally, the country has followed the '10+2+3' system of education under the National Education Policy of 1986, which includes 10, 2 and 3 years of primary & secondary, higher secondary and (at least) 3 years of undergraduate study before one can pursue a Master's or a PhD (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). A glance at the recent trends in the ownership of educational institutions across India reveals to the reader an interesting aspect- a stark increase in the amount of private educational institutions, as opposed to the public/government-administered institutions. Various studies on this subject have been done; for instance, one study states that nearly 60% of the total higher education institutions in the country are owned/controlled/promoted by the private sector (Sheikh, 2017), leaving a mere 40% to the public sector. Despite the apparent increase in the quality of education since independence, better rankings and indicators and a larger share of the literate population in the country, there still have been debates on the purpose and impact of privatisation on [higher] education.

### **Aims & Objectives**

This essay will explore privatisation in the education sector. The analysis in this paper will try to delve into:

- a) The interrelation between the education sector and the economy
- b) The privatisation trends in the education sector & their various implications
- c) How privatisation has impacted the different socio-economic strata and induced public-private dichotomy, with special reference to India's school education system
- d) India's education model, and contemporary problems & solutions
- e) How has privatisation emerged as a broader phenomenon in the context of the recent New Education Policy (NEP)?

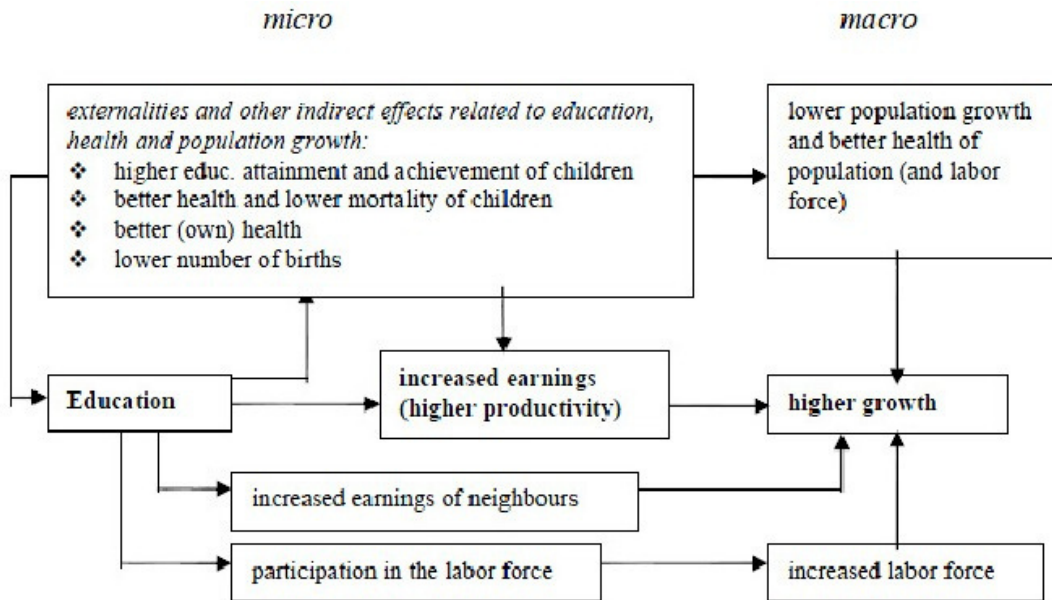
### **How are Education & Economy related?**

There are several factors that bind education and the economy of a country together as the essence of education is to provide the country with assets that can, in the future, help the country grow by allowing its people to get more jobs, inventing & innovating new ideas, which thus allow a much greater rise in the efficiency and the productivity levels of individuals in the country's economy. In this way, education's major contribution to the economic growth of a country, spread over large periods of time, binds them both in a significant relation to each other. It is for this reason that education, along with healthcare, is often referred to as the two most substantial indicators of the socioeconomic growth of a country; this is evident from their inclusion in the Human Development Index (HDI) prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which uses indices from nearly 190 countries and allocates them global ranks based on their life expectancy, education/literacy levels and the average income levels (gross national income per capita, adjusted according to purchasing power parity in US Dollars). Thus the gradual process of teaching & nurturing students in schools should not only be viewed in terms of [the public/private sector] having to hire teachers, using basic infrastructure & other resources but also in terms of allowing the students to grow in terms of their physical as well as intellectual prowess, which are eventually proven productive for the society and the economy they are part of. Since the last 30 years or so, the advent of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, especially in India, has only led to more consolidation in this belief of countries acknowledging human resources to be the most important resources possessed by them, and consequently using all the resources at their disposal to induce human resource development, by means such as better education, healthcare, skill development, etc. The accelerated trend of globalization in the past decade or so has only accorded a more prestigious position to education, with countries now investing more in individuals through

research & development, vocational skills, training in social and emotional quotients, etc, to be able to produce trained & educated individuals who have the potential to face the dynamic challenges of the 21st century. This fundamental understanding of its significance has allowed proportionate investments in education for the growth of the said human resource, through two levels described as follows:

- A. Micro Investment
- B. Macro Investment

Micro investment is usually done when a person invests in himself, and when the government/ the State invests in its people, it is conversely called Macro investment, as further explained in the diagram given below.



**Figure 1:** The Returns of Education, (Michaelowa, 2000)

This diagram helps us in understanding how exactly education leads to a return on investment for both the person involved and the state. When a person is educated, it directly correlates to the fact that they can procure better jobs which leads to two basic things-

- 1) **Higher Earnings;** they earn more as they are now more qualified and can apply for better jobs
- 2) **Higher Growth & Productivity;** as more people are educated, it indirectly means that the number of people that would participate in getting jobs would increase, thus, increasing labour and increasing the productivity of the people which leads to the growth of the economy of the state. (Michaelowa, 2000)

The people themselves also benefit by finding better jobs that offer higher pay/compensation for their labour and services, which leads to higher sustainability of incomes and employment levels in the long run. While this is the interrelation between education and the economy at the micro-level, a comprehensive analysis of both at the macro-level requires taking into account and studying various other variables, including the effect of privatisation, especially in this context. This paper will now attempt to outline the broader working of the education sector in India before the impact of privatisation can be studied.

### **The working of the Education sector now**

The government usually classifies various sectors of the economy into two parts- strategic and non-strategic. Strategic sectors are often classified as the critical sectors that are vital for a country's growth (like defence, energy, law & administration, foreign affairs, critical resources, etc) and are largely administered/managed by the government itself, whereas non-strategic sectors are the sectors that might be controlled by either the government or the private sector (by both in some cases) to help the economy or to provide better services for citizens. Education is one of the non-strategic sectors, characterised by the dual presence of both the state and the private institutions, since the state may not be able to fulfil the needs of the growing number of people that seek education, the implications of which shall be discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

For instance, the figure given below is a representation of the ownership/management of the universities (public and private) that existed during 2008-2009 in India.

**TABLE 1: Number of University & University Level Institutions**

Sl. No.	State	Central University	State University	Private University	Deemed University	Institutions Established Under State legislature Act	Institution of National Importance	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Andhra Pradesh	3	21	0	4	2	2	32
2	Arunachal Pradesh	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
3	Assam	2	4	0	0	0	2	8
4	Bihar	0	13	0	2	1	2	18
5	Chhattisgarh	1	7	0	0	0	1	9
6	Goa	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
7	Gujarat	0	16	5	2	0	1	24
8	Haryana	0	6	0	3	0	1	10
9	Himachal Pradesh	0	3	1	0	0	1	5
10	Jammu & Kashmir	0	6	0	0	1	1	8
11	Jharkhand	0	4	0	2	0	1	7
12	Karnataka	0	16	0	14	0	1	31
13	Kerala	0	7	0	2	0	2	11
14	Madhya Pradesh	2	13	0	2	0	1	18
15	Maharashtra	1	19	0	21	0	2	43
16	Manipur	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
17	Meghalaya	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
18	Mizoram	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
19	Nagaland	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
20	Odisha	0	10	0	2	0	2	14
21	Punjab	0	7	1	2	0	3	13
22	Rajasthan	0	14	4	7	0	2	27
23	Sikkim	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
24	Tamil Nadu	0	20	0	25	0	3	48
25	Tripura	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
26	Uttar Pradesh	4	19	4	10	1	2	40
27	Uttarakhand	1	5	3	4	0	1	14
28	West Bengal	1	18	0	1	0	3	23
29	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
30	Chandigarh	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
31	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
32	Daman & Diu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
33	Delhi	4	1	0	11	0	2	18
34	Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35	Puducherry	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>440</b>

Source: University Grants Commission (UGC)

**Figure 2:** Number of University and University-Level Institutions across India;

Source: Statistics of Higher and Technical Education 2008-09 (MHRD, 2012)

Here, one can clearly see the total number of universities in India is 440 in number, out of which the number of private universities is a meagre 21, whereas the number of public institutions is 419 (i.e., 440-21). Interestingly, in recent times, as late as 2019, the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report shows the following data (to be observed is the number of universities, not the responses):

<b>Box 2: Response of Universities during 2019-20</b>		
<b>Type of university</b>	<b>Number of Universities</b>	<b>Number of Response*</b>
<b>Central University</b>	48	46
<b>Central Open University</b>	1	1
<b>Institution of National Importance</b>	135	133
<b>State Public University</b>	386	379
<b>Institution Under State Legislature Act</b>	5	5
<b>State Open University</b>	14	14
<b>State Private University</b>	327	315
<b>State Private Open University</b>	1	1
<b>Deemed University- Government</b>	36	36
<b>Deemed University- Government Aided</b>	10	9
<b>Deemed University- Private</b>	80	80
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1043</b>	<b>1019</b>
<i>*Including 26 universities which have uploaded data for AISHE 2017-18 to 2018-19.</i>		

**Figure 3:** Response of Universities during 2019-20;

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20 (DHE-MHRD, 2020)

What is apparent is that, currently, there are 640 public institutions, as opposed to the 419 in 2008-09, which means that the percentage increase in public institutions is only 52.74%. Whereas, on the other hand, compared to the earlier 21, private institutions have now increased to 408 in number, amounting to a whopping 1842.86 per cent increase.



Here, the following question comes to mind- what does such a rapid increase in private institutions mean in the long run for the education sector? It can be answered in the following ways:

1) Perhaps the most visible & the most obvious inference is the increase in the prices for pursuing higher education- the reason being that as the population of India grows, so does the need for more universities that could accommodate the enormous number of students graduating from their high school (Ravi, 2015). Earlier, because of the high number of public institutions, it indirectly meant that education was largely accessible to the larger public. The small increase in public universities as opposed to private ones led to a more significant increase in the price of university education and thus in proportion meant that fewer people were able to afford such [quality] education. As explained by the diagram above, the number of people who can work thus decreases, therefore, in effect meaning that it adversely affects the economy of the country.

2) The socio-economic gap, which was prevalent even during the earlier decades continues to increase, meaning- the rich get richer and the poor get poorer as they are unable to afford education, except the few that are able to enrol in a public institution that is affordable, and thus they are unable to get better-paying jobs which require qualifications to apply for (Hoque, 2018).

On one hand, it is pleasing to know that government intervention in the education sector still prevails and hasn't been reduced to an absolute zero figure. On the other hand, one sees the sheer number of private institutions that have emerged over the last 10 years or so with the aim to combat the increasing demand for higher education. However, this rise in the number of private institutions has led us into this scenario where the need for the affordability of quality higher education (at private institutions) is dire but the country's lagging growth is visible from its 132nd rank in the Human Development Index, inducing a process wherein private universities and colleges have been increasingly incentivised to establish, administer and promote themselves to uplift the status of education levels in the country, which public institutions have repeatedly failed to do so.

### **The dichotomy between public and private education in India**

The various examples and the study of the status of education- especially at the higher education level in India, only reveal the emergence of the private players in this sector, and to some extent, the withdrawal of the State. While higher education often occupies the limelight in the sector's studies- due to its essential role in producing trained individuals that later form the workforce and add to the income of the country, the lower levels, including primary/elementary, secondary and higher secondary are often not at the helm of such studies, and thus ignored. What is important though is to realise & acknowledge that the lower levels of education are responsible for creating & shaping the fundamentals of the traits and the skills an individual possesses later in life. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to view the education sector as a whole and include all levels of education in its studies & its reforms. The following sections shall solely discuss the current status of the school education system prevailing in India vis-a-vis privatisation.

The binary nature of school education in India, broadly classified into public and private, has been reflective of the disparity that exists between the two. This also forms the core of the discussions that have been centred around the Indian education system. This ever-growing gulf has resulted in the reduced capacity of the poor and weaker sections of society to be ambitious and have opportunities as compared to the better sections. The differences that sharply divide the two groups can be based on the following factors – infrastructural facilities, socioeconomic status, medium of instruction and level of outcome. These are discussed ahead, in detail.

#### *Infrastructural Facilities*

The polarity between private and public schools is evidenced by the quality of infrastructural facilities present in both cases. In India, around 25 crore students are enrolled into 15 lakh schools (for more information, refer to Appendix C). Among these students, about half or nearly 12 crores attend private institutions, which amounts to 1/3rd of the total number of schools (Arora, 2020). The remaining 2/3rd of the share is accounted for by the public schools, which cater to the needs of the other half (Kishore and Jha, 2020). Although the bigger share is held by public schools, there has been a notable escalation in the number of private academies as well.

One of the prime reasons for the same could be the higher standards of infrastructure delivered by private organizations, as discussed earlier (for more information, refer to Appendix D). While sophisticated amenities like language labs and digital libraries are catered by private players, it is surprising to know that public schools often even struggle to maintain clean washrooms. In addition, the teaching and non-teaching staff in public schools tend to exhibit lower levels of accountability as compared to private ones. This leads to an increased rate of absenteeism amongst the staff members. A study conducted in 3500 public schools across the country revealed that about 25% of primary teachers were absent. Also, only half of the teachers present were found to be tutoring the students. The others were reported to have been engaged in private errands (Harjani, 2018).

#### *Socio-economic status*

A sharp contrast can be seen between the two cases on the basis of the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. As per general observation, students from economically stronger families are admitted to private schools. On the other hand, public schools are mainly chosen by financially weaker families. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) of 2020, assets such as a smartphone were available to 54.6% of students in public schools as compared to 74.2% in private ones (Pratham Foundation, 2021) (for more information, refer to Appendix E). The decision of enrolling students in public schools is not taken on the basis of the quality of education but on economic restraints. A survey carried out across 13 villages in the country, covering 250 families, revealed a general inclination towards private education (Härmä, 2011). A wide range of co-curricular activities and state-of-the-art facilities are furnished by private educators which works as an advantage. However, the tuition charged for these services is five times higher than that of public schools. The fee structure can range anywhere from 30,000 INR per month to 13,00,000 INR per year. Recent data shows that Indians who earn more than 25,000 INR per month comprise the top 10% of the population. Thus elite private education remains entirely unattainable for the rest of the population.

#### *Medium of instruction*

Differentiation can also be made with respect to the medium of instruction in public and private schools. As a greater sense of achievement is tied to education in the English medium, students

tend to approach private schools more. However, access to English medium education is linked to factors such as caste, gender and economic status. Data findings indicate that students belonging to the top 20% of the economic ladder are ten times more likely to get an English education. Further, the likelihood of general-category students getting an English-medium education is three times more than that of an SC (Scheduled Caste) student in India (Kishore and Jha, 2020). Focusing on gender, families often compromise on the girl child's education and promote English as the medium of instruction for boys. The increase in demand for an English-based curriculum has led to the steady rise of private institutions. The number of these schools and the students attending them has grown over the past two decades from 19% in 2006 to 31% in 2014 (Kundu, 2014). In sum, the number of private schools is directly proportional to the demand for English education.

#### *Level of Outcome*

A study conducted by the Young Lives Survey (YLS) for students aged between 5-12 throws light on the gradual development of an achievement gap. The students were examined on Maths and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). The performance at the elementary level in private and public schools was nearly similar. However, the gap significantly widened at the pre-adolescent level. Students from public schools had a 10 to 28 percentage point, and 9 and 19 percentage point chance of performing poorly in math and PPVT, respectively, vis-a-vis the private schoolers (McDonough et al., 2021). The survey also suggested that private schools contribute more towards value addition and provide a comprehensive learning experience. Further, schools in urban areas were found to produce better results than the ones in rural areas (ODID, 2022). There can be a number of causes behind such an achievement gap. The focus on holistic versus strict scholastic education can be cited as one. Private schools while concentrating on the overall development of the students provide them with wide opportunities to hone their extracurricular talents. Public schools lack the infrastructure, resources and networks to do the same. As a result, public-educated pupils fall behind their private counterparts who possess the cultural capital and sophistication required by higher educational institutions.

The above-discussed points can be understood with regard to the prime objective(s) of both types of schools. Public schools seem to be essentially concerned with the provision of basic literacy. For ensuring maximum participation in these schools, incentivization schemes such as free uniforms, textbooks and mid-day meals are often provided by the government (Härmä, 2011). On the contrary, private schools aim to build a multi-skilled individual. This difference in objectives produces highly varying results, which eventually work to the disadvantage of students in the public sector. In order to reduce this learning gap, the government has taken initiatives such as the reservation of the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in private schools. Along with that, many low-cost, private schools have also been set up with the aim of providing increased exposure to the students. However, these steps have proven to be unsuccessful due to several reasons. EWS category students hardly cope with the environment of private schools owing to perceived class differences. Along with this, low-cost private schools remain inaccessible to the poverty-stricken. The additional costs of educational resources make it impossible for these groups to secure private education. In fine, it can be said that despite the constant efforts, the goal orientation of public and private schools remains the same. While the former struggles to maintain its existence, the latter strives towards excellence.

### **India's Education Model- Problems & Solutions**

After studying the current situation of the education sector in India at both higher and lower levels, one can perceive the differences induced by the privatisation of education. More often than not, privatisation has led to a widespread increase in the quality of education, although at decreased accessibility to large sections of the population and at extravagant costs that can be afforded only by the financially-well sections. The next essential step in this paper is to take a look at the [potential] solutions & devise a feasible model, if possible, that would be affordable for the public at large and practically possible for a developing country like India. Therefore, the primary aim of the model shall be to ensure that more people are getting educated and are thus able to contribute to the economy and society.

An important, initial step in doing this is to take a look at the Finnish Education Model, one that is starkly different from ours. To begin with, the Finnish education model is regarded as one of the

best in the world, where the focus is on practical learning rather than being taught in a standardized way, which includes tests and other memorization-related courses. While these small changes have gone a long way in shaping the Finnish model system, perhaps the most important thing out of all of them is the fact that Finland bans any institution from profiting from basic education and a majority of their institutions are publicly owned, which makes it easier for them to be managed by the State. It also allocates proper resources in this sector, combined with a rigorous testing procedure to select & appoint teachers in schools, and offering them job security and ample wage with flexible work hours- as most days in Finland's universities start somewhere between 9 and 9:45 am. Thus, in this regard, Finland has made quite a strong education structure for itself, while also giving students alternatives in terms of the courses they [want to] study. Moreover, education is free of cost for students which makes a huge difference in terms of incentives for low-income households to send their children to pursue primary & secondary studies (CCE, 2022)

On a closer look, one can easily infer that the Finnish model is in clear contrast to the current Indian model of education, wherein students follow a rigorous structure to achieve higher education, which also includes a higher financial cost. The Indian model leads to more students actually opting out (dropping out) of pursuing further studies, mainly because of the reason that they can't afford it, leading to lesser productivity and consequently, applying for low-quality jobs. This goes on to harm the country's per capita income. As a result of having a low-quality job, people are often unable to fulfil their potential and cannot even afford basic necessities, thus leading to an increase in the previously-mentioned socio-economic divide.

Thus, after an analysis of these factors, it is impractical to simply conclude that the government should 1) be the one investing its finances & other resources in education, and 2) ban privatisation as a whole. This is because even though privatisation is not affordable, it still has students enrolling in private institutions and also provides long-term employment to various strata of society. Thus, because there is no way to completely do away with privatisation, a more sensible argument is to make do with the present resources and strive to create a more co-dependent ecosystem for the public and the private players in the education sector.

The major problem with public institutions is the lack of infrastructure and faculty owing to a lack of funds, while private institutions face criticism due to their exorbitant pricing and no job securities, offering a majority of people jobs only on a contractual basis. As mentioned earlier, inhibiting the growth of private institutions by any means is more often than not counterproductive to the socioeconomic development of the country. Therefore, more pragmatic solutions have to be implemented in the education sector to increase accessibility and the affordability of education at all levels and minimise the consequent socio-economic gap among various groups & classes across the country.

With respect to the argument presented at the beginning of the section titled ‘The dichotomy between public and private education in India’, a comprehensive study of the contemporary challenges & prospects faced by the Indian system of education (at the school level) is essential towards reforming the education sector as a whole. First, it is essential to acknowledge that the Indian schooling system is by no means perfect and host to a whole range of problems. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of teachers and the poor quality of education are only some of the many foundational issues in the public education setup of the country. According to one ‘State of The Sector Report on Private Schools in India’ by the Central Square Foundation (CSF) from the year 2020, it has been observed that parents prefer private education for their children due to the better quality of education, dedicated teaching staff as well as the prospect of being taught in English as the dominant medium of instruction.

From 1973 to 2017, enrolments in private unaided schools grew 33 times (CSF, 2020). The result is that a significant proportion of students in the country now attend private educational institutions – nearly 50% (CSF, 2020). While such an apparent increase in enrolment in private institutions might signal the apparent edge these institutions have over the public education setup, the reality is in fact quite different.

As it turns out, private education is not without its own faults- learning levels have either declined over time or have remained stagnant and this has been exacerbated by class as well as gender divisions (CSF, 2020). Moreover, valuable information is not widely prevalent regarding the supposed quality of education associated with these institutions. For example, 60% of private

schools do not extend to the grade of board examinations, therefore standardised information on these schools' learning outcomes does not exist. As a consequence, private school owners do not have the required incentives or the pressure to improve learning levels among students (CSF, 2020).

While it is important to initiate changes that might provide more valuable insight into the functioning of private institutions so that parents might make informed choices, the consistently receding public education setup must also strive to make a comeback if education for all is to be ensured in line with the commitments under Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution. As things stand, the private-unaided schooling system is bound to consistently grow over the next decade.

In such a scenario, two broad strategies must be employed. These are as follows:

- 1) Concentrated efforts towards improving the quality of public education in the country
- 2) Introducing a system of oversight and regulation in privately aided institutions

The former would be seen in terms of an infrastructure overhaul, better screening processes for teacher recruitment and institutional redesign. While the Government of India has been largely successful in raising accessibility and equity, owing to the Right To Education Act and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), it still lacks in the crucial area of the quality of education (refer to Appendix F).

Therefore, the need of the hour is to develop effective strategies and unique solutions to improve the education sector in India. A handful of such solutions include the following:

- 1) **Better management & administration in public institutions;** this includes inculcating transparency & accountability among the top officials managing the said institutions, developing more rigorous, uniform and unbiased selection procedures for the appointment of teachers & professors, providing incentives not only by reduced tuition charges but also by other lucrative means such as coordinating jobs & internship offers post-study, scholarships to athletes and other students with exemplary track records in one or the other domain, etc. Another way is to ensure compliance with legal & technical regulations, encourage research & academic culture among



scholars, establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with both domestic & foreign institutions for better cooperation & collaboration in different spheres, etc

2) **Minimising setbacks within private education;** extravagant costs are perhaps the single biggest drawback on the path of accessing private education. Yet, what is often overlooked is the huge costs of investment borne by the private players to set up such institutions; therefore above-average market costs of education are the only way for such institutions to ensure their existence and survival in the market. Once this is realised, a small yet overwhelming potential solution is for the State to aid private players in lowering their investment costs, which can include subsidies and/or tax relief(s) on land, basic services (such as water, electricity, etc), reduced registration & compliance costs, which over time compound and lead to huge expenditures for the founders. Similarly, establishing options for students to allow intra-course transfers between public and private institutions, MOUs for better academic exchanges and encouraging student diversity (with respect to their social and financial backgrounds), etc can be game-changing solutions to bridge the gap between the public and the private sectors in the education sector.

Thus to reform India's ailing education system, the focus shall be towards increasing accountability (especially administrative accountability), introducing proper recruitment & training procedures, and ensuring quality control without the possibility of institutional bias. With regard to private-unaided schools, the government should introduce proper tools for oversight and regulation in order to prevent the associated loss in learning levels. Moreover, in line with the recent National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, measures such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) should also be initiated; however, their focus should be geared towards knowledge & skill transfer and not mere philanthropic or ownership-transfer agreements. The focus needs to be on improving public education through the learnings and experiences of the private setup, as opposed to allowing both to stagnate as separate entities. Moreover, technological and digital inputs need to be integrated into the teaching system in order to further bolster inclusivity and equity so that education for all may become a reality.

### **NEP'ing the system**

In the context of the privatisation of education, the National Education Policy of 2020 is a step in the right direction for it emphasises higher literacy among students and calls (read allows) for a more flexible structure in syllabi across both the higher & the lower levels of education across India, which are guided by the Academic Bank of Credit- a new, unique system of course credit the likes of which have been followed & implemented in leading global universities & schools since long (Kurien & Chandramana, 2020). Poised as one of the biggest reforms in the education sector since 1947, the NEP seeks to create a 'hub of knowledge' within the schools & universities in India and paves the way for multi-disciplinary education in India- a trend like the popular liberal arts education advocated by the Western universities (Pathak, 2021). A closer reading of this policy not only reveals the strong emphasis on the integration of disciplines (pure sciences, business, humanities and social sciences), critical thinking & understanding, and development of social and emotional traits among students, but also the following aims in the education sector- to increase the quality of education, to make education affordable, accessible, accountable and equitable for all, regardless of their social/cultural/political/economic backgrounds (Kumar et al., 2020). While these goals may sound generic at first, the NEP as a policy document talks in detail about reforming the regulatory framework within the education sector, increasing state-administered investment in education via public institutions, emphasis on technology and digital inputs (such as by teaching coding/programming to students at a young age) to adapt to the dynamic challenges of the 21st century, formulation of overseeing education commission(s) at the national levels, etc (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). In particular, it talks of almost doubling state expenditure on public education from the present 10% of the total public expenditure to a newer amount of 20% of the total capital at the disposal of the government. Further, the establishment of a National Education Commission or a 'Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog' that would work in tandem with other organisations such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), University Grants Commission (UGC), and Department of Higher Education (DHE) under the Ministry of Education (previously known as the Ministry for Human Resource Development or MHRD), is a welcome proposal that has the potential to shape & guide the spirit of the forthcoming education reforms in India, under the leadership of the Prime Minister of India itself. While such reforms at the moment can not be attributed to targeting either the public or the private sector of education in particular, they are certainly intended to make governance in education better than before- a step that is promisingly well-thought to uproot the misgovernance in several public & private educational institutions.

Further, it also encourages private institutions in particular 1) to make education more affordable by providing out larger (than before) scholarships to a higher number of students, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds, and 2) to operate under the aegis of an apex body called the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)- one like the previously-mentioned National Education Commission, although HECI being specifically for all (both public & private) higher education institutions (HEI) (Kalyani, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Through this research paper, the author has made an attempt to observe and analyse the situation of the education sector in India. Using examples & data from different levels of education in the country, the paper discusses various aspects such as socio-economic gaps in the population, varying levels of quality, affordability & accessibility to education that exist among different sections of society, and how privatisation has had a mixed bag of results over the last few decades or so. While these factors provide more than a satisfactory outlook on the education sector, one can not choose to ignore the latest addition to this list of variables i.e., the NEP of 2020. The NEP, while being revolutionary in its spirit, has sought to alter & reform this sector; yet its promising effects are yet to be seen for it is too new of a policy. A comprehensive study of the NEP on the sector and its consequent effects on the society and the economy of India shall require at least 4-5 years of data before one comes to a conclusion. For the time being, this paper shall emphasise privatisation being both a boon and a bane for India's education, as discussed in multiple sections. While improving the quality of education across multiple levels and institutions remains the need of the hour, ensuring its affordability, as well as accessibility, needs to be made a priority too, for, the bureaucrats, policymakers as well as the (non-governmental) civil society organisations that are looking to make a difference in this sector. Lastly, the accelerated pace in the trends of privatisation in the aftermath of the 1991 reforms, should not be mingled with, since it has also led to significant economic growth, despite its array of drawbacks. Like other sectors, the way forward should be to encourage more privatisation by several means and encourage PPP, while ensuring that public institutions are not forgotten to be left as symbols of a bygone era- symbols that remind

us of the ever-widening rich-poor gap, among other drawbacks of India's education system.

## References

1. Abrol, M. (2016). *Emerging Trends of Privatization of Education in India*. International Journal of Educational Administration, 8(1), 1–6. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from [https://www.ripublication.com/ijea16/ijeav8n1\\_01.pdf](https://www.ripublication.com/ijea16/ijeav8n1_01.pdf).
2. Aithal, P. S., & Aithal, S. (2020). *Analysis of the Indian National Education policy 2020 towards achieving its objectives*. International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS), 5(2), 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3676074>
3. Aithal, P. S., & Aithal, S. (2020). *Implementation strategies of higher education part of National Education Policy 2020 of India towards achieving its objectives*. International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences, 5(2), 283–326. <https://doi.org/10.47992/ijmts.2581.6012.0119>
4. Arora, A. (2020, December 7). *Private vs public education: Which industry is where and why?* India Today. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/private-vs-public-education-which-industry-is-where-and-why-1742583-2020-12-07>
5. Bel, Germa (2006). *"The Coining of "Privatization" and Germany's National Socialist Party"*. Journal of Economic Perspectives. 20 (3): 187–194. [doi:10.1257/jep.20.3.187](https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.20.3.187). S2CID 33815402.
6. CCE. (n.d.). *Introduction to Finland Education*. CCE Finland. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.ccefinland.org/finedu>
7. CSF. (2020). *State of The Sector Report on Private Schools in India*. New Delhi; Central Square Foundation (CSF) from <https://www.centralsquarefoundation.org/State-of-the-Sector-Report-on-Private-Schools-in-India.pdf>

8. DHE-MHRD, D. H. E.-M. H. R. D. (2020, December). *All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20*. New Delhi; Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India from [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe\\_eng.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe_eng.pdf)
9. Directorate, O. S. (n.d.). *OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms - Privatisation Definition*. © 2003 OECD. <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=3287>
10. Drucker, P. F. (1969). *The Age of Discontinuity*. Science Direct. Harper & Row. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780434903955/the-age-of-discontinuity?via=ihub=>
11. Harjani, C. G. (2018, December 22). *Examining private education for the poor in India*. Medium. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://medium.com/@celinegh/examining-private-education-for-the-poor-in-india-737a4cc6d8a2>
12. Härmä, J. (2011). *Low cost private schooling in India: Is it pro poor and equitable?* International Journal of Educational Development, 31(4), 350–356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.01.003>
13. Hoque, J. (2018). *Quality Concern in Higher Education in India*. EDULIGHT Journal, 7(13), 662–668 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331686057\\_Quality\\_Concern\\_in\\_Higher\\_Education\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331686057_Quality_Concern_in_Higher_Education_in_India)
14. Kalyani, P. (2020). *An Empirical Study on NEP 2020 [National Education Policy] with Special Reference to the Future of Indian Education System and Its effects on the Stakeholders*. Journal of Management Engineering and Information Technology (JMEIT), 7(5), 1–17. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4159546>
15. Kishore, R., & Jha, A. (2020, August 1). *Mapping education inequalities*. Hindustan Times. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mapping-education-inequalities/story-xhTIIYty7kF7MNqxnOyGtO.html>
16. Kumar, K., Prakash, A., & Singh, K. (2020). *How national education policy 2020 can be a lodestar to transform future generation in India*. Journal of Public Affairs, 21(3). <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2500>

17. Kundu, P. (2014, January). *Educational Inequalities in India*. New Delhi; Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability.
18. Kurien, A., & Chandramana, S. B. (2020). *Impact of New Education Policy 2020 on Higher Education*. In Conference: AtmaNirbhar Bharat: A Roadmap to Self-reliant IndiaAt: Thiruvalla, Project: Sustainable Development, IQAC & Department of Management Studies, MACFAST, Tiruvalla, India, November.
19. Kwaghe, Z. E. (2020). *A History of Privatisation: The Global Perspective*. International Journal of Humanitatis Theoreticus, 3(1), 141–152. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352297050\\_A\\_History\\_of\\_Privatisation\\_The\\_Global\\_Perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352297050_A_History_of_Privatisation_The_Global_Perspective).
20. McDonough, I. K., Roychowdhury, P., & Dhamija, G. (2021). *Measuring the dynamics of the achievement gap between public and private school students during early life in India*. Journal of Labor Research, 42(1), 78–122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-020-09307-2>
21. MHRD, M. H. R. D. (2012, July 16). *Statistics of Higher and Technical Education 2008-09*. New Delhi; Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India from [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/StatHTE\\_2008-09.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/StatHTE_2008-09.pdf)
22. Michaelowa, K. (2000). *Returns to Education in Low-Income Countries: Evidence for Africa*. Committee on Developing Countries of the German Economic Association, 1–32. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-172439>
23. ODID. (2022, March 28). *Private Schools in India: more learning, more inequality?* Oxford Department of International Development (ODID). Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/private-schools-india-more-learning-more-inequality>

24. Pathak, R. (2021). *National Education Policy 2020: Can it improve faculty motivation and academic outcomes in India?* International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science, 3(4), 573–579. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rakesh-Pathak-3/publication/350922817\\_NATIONAL\\_EDUCATION\\_POLICY\\_2020\\_CAN\\_IT\\_IMPROVE\\_FACULTY\\_MOTIVATION\\_AND\\_ACADEMIC\\_OUTCOMES\\_IN\\_INDIA/links/6079d1ac907dcf667ba443c7/NATIONAL-EDUCATION-POLICY-2020-CAN-IT-IMPROVE-FACULTY-MOTIVATION-AND-ACADEMIC-OUTCOMES-IN-INDIA.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rakesh-Pathak-3/publication/350922817_NATIONAL_EDUCATION_POLICY_2020_CAN_IT_IMPROVE_FACULTY_MOTIVATION_AND_ACADEMIC_OUTCOMES_IN_INDIA/links/6079d1ac907dcf667ba443c7/NATIONAL-EDUCATION-POLICY-2020-CAN-IT-IMPROVE-FACULTY-MOTIVATION-AND-ACADEMIC-OUTCOMES-IN-INDIA.pdf).
25. Pratham Foundation. (2021, November). *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) of 2020*. New Delhi; Pratham Foundation from [http://img.asercentre.org/graphics/aserdigitalcheck2020fortufts\\_01.09.21.pdf](http://img.asercentre.org/graphics/aserdigitalcheck2020fortufts_01.09.21.pdf)
26. Ravi, S. S. (2015). *Impact of Privatisation of Education in Indian Society*. Journal of Culture, Society and Development, 6, 22–26. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from [https://core.ac.uk/display/234690968?utm\\_source=pdf&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1](https://core.ac.uk/display/234690968?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1).
27. Sheikh, Y. A. (2017). *Higher Education in India: Challenges and opportunities*. Journal of Education and Practice, 8(1), 39–42. <https://doi.org/10.17758/uruae.uh0317053>
28. Singh, P. R. (2021). *Inclusive Education in India – Concept, Need and Challenges*. International Journal of Social Science & Management Studies (I.J.S.S.M.S.), 7(7), 97–103. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anuranjan-Singh-3/publication/356467857\\_Women\\_Participation\\_in\\_Indian\\_Politics\\_Struggle\\_for\\_Visibility/links/619ce0de61f0987720c7bb1d/Women-Participation-in-Indian-Politics-Struggle-for-Visibility.pdf#page=100](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anuranjan-Singh-3/publication/356467857_Women_Participation_in_Indian_Politics_Struggle_for_Visibility/links/619ce0de61f0987720c7bb1d/Women-Participation-in-Indian-Politics-Struggle-for-Visibility.pdf#page=100).

**Appendix A****Percentage of Children enrolled in school. By age group, sex and school type. 2020.**

Age group and sex	Govt	Pvt	Other	Not enrolled	Total
Age 6-14: All	65.8	28.8	0.8	4.6	100
Age 7-16: All	65.5	28.6	0.7	5.2	100
Age 7-10: All	64.3	30.5	0.8	4.4	100
Age 7-10: Boys	60.9	33.6	0.8	4.7	100
Age 7-10: Girls	68.1	27.0	0.8	4.1	100
Age 11-14: All	68.0	27.4	0.7	3.9	100
Age 11-14: Boys	64.5	30.9	0.7	3.9	100
Age 11-14: Girls	71.9	23.5	0.7	3.9	100
Age 15-16: All	62.1	27.3	0.6	9.9	100
Age 15-16: Boys	60.8	29.7	0.8	8.8	100
Age 15-16: Girls	63.6	24.8	0.5	11.1	100



## Appendix B

**Enrollment status of young children (age 5-8). Status from 2020 and percentage point change over 2018 levels.**

Age	Not enrolled	Enrolled in:			Total
		Anganwadi	Pre-primary*	Primary**	
5	14.9	24.1	26.2	34.9	100
	+6.8	-4.0	-4.2	+1.4	0.0
6	7.9	5.6	15.2	71.3	100
	+4.5	-2.0	-3.1	+0.5	0.0
7	5.7	0.9	6.6	86.8	100
	+3.9	-0.9	-1.5	-1.5	0.0
8	3.9	0.4	2.0	93.8	100
	+2.4	-0.3	-1.8	-0.3	0.0
5-8	7.5	6.4	11.2	74.9	100
	+4.0	-2.6	-3.3	+1.9	0.0
6-10	5.3				
	+3.5				
11-14	3.9				
	+0.7				

## Appendix C

**Percentage of children enrolled in school. By grade, sex and school type.**

Std	ASER 2018						ASER 2020					
	Boys			Girls			Boys			Girls		
	Govt	Pvt	Total	Govt	Pvt	Total	Govt	Pvt	Total	Govt	Pvt	Total
Std I-II	57.9	42.1	100	65.1	34.9	100	61.1	38.9	100	66.7	33.4	100
Std III-V	62.7	37.3	100	71.2	28.8	100	65.6	34.4	100	73.3	26.7	100
Std VI-VIII	65.8	34.3	100	73.3	26.7	100	68.3	31.7	100	77.0	23.0	100
Std IX & above	64.6	35.4	100	68.9	31.2	100	69.7	30.4	100	72.7	27.3	100
All	62.8	37.2	100	70.0	30.0	100	66.4	33.6	100	73.0	27.0	100

**Appendix D**

**Percentage of enrolled children who have textbooks for their current grade. By grade and school type. 2020.**

Std	Govt	Pvt	Govt & Pvt
Std I-II	79.8	69.7	76.2
Std III-V	85.5	72.0	81.4
Std VI-VIII	86.3	73.7	82.8
Std IX & above	82.7	73.5	80.0
All	84.1	72.2	80.5

**Appendix E**

**Percentage of enrolled children with selected assets available at home. By school type and asset type. 2018 and 2020.**

Household resource	% Children					
	ASER 2018			ASER 2020		
	Govt	Pvt	Govt & Pvt	Govt	Pvt	Govt & Pvt
Smartphone	29.6	49.9	36.5	56.4	74.2	61.8
TV	54.8	72.5	60.7	56.0	71.9	60.8
Motorized vehicle	39.1	62.5	46.9	43.5	64.7	49.9

**Appendix F**

**Access to Education: Ranking of States in India**

