Review of Government Policies and Budgets in Mitigating Learning Losses during COVID-19 in India

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Literature Review</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Mapping of select educational indicators pre-COVID and during COVID period</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Mapping of Union Government and State-led policy Initiatives</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Mapping of Budgetary interventions to address learning recovery</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Conclusions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

As the world experienced one of the deadliest pandemics in 2020, many countries across the globe imposed extended and multiple lockdowns to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In the process, many schools were shut down, and online teaching became the norm. India was the country with the second most prolonged closure of schools linked to the pandemic in the world-second only to Uganda (Hamid & Poorvaja, 2022). In India, many government and private schools transitioned to virtual learning options to prevent disruption to children’s education. However, the virtual learning environment and its outcomes during the pandemic have been debated worldwide.

The digital learning mode has impacted the quality of education on all levels, more so for school education. When school-based education services were closed for approximately 167 million children at the beginning of the pandemic, 19.01 billion instructional days were lost, with enormous losses occurring in middle-income countries (Pattnaik et.al, 2023). A Parliamentary Standing Committee Report in August 2021 mentioned that 40% of students had not accessed remote learning and that the learning loss was critical as students had lost one-tenth of their schooling (Hamid & Poorvaja, 2023).

While most of the schools reopened in the beginning of 2022 and regular face to face learning has been resumed, students and parents are gradually gaining confidence. However, in the last two years, as the scale of learning loss was huge, the reopening of schools is not enough. Students need intensive support to recover lost education and building back better. A stock taking of the current scenario can only help in understanding where the gaps are and what needs to be done to make the system sustainable.

In this backdrop, this discussion paper offers an in-depth analysis of the present situation of school education system. The research questions addressed in the paper are following:

1. Mapping the educational status of children for the last two years (2020-21 and 2021-22)
2. Analysing government policies and budgets towards mitigating educational deprivation that has been created during Covid-19.
3. Examining how far the measures are resilient in building back a sustainable education system

To portray an all-India picture, the analysis has been carried out for the Union Government as well as state governments. Four states – West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu, representing all the four regions have been selected for the analysis.

The paper has been presented in five sections. After a brief introduction, the first section of the paper carries out a detailed literature review to capture the impact of the pandemic on schooling and learning in the last two years. Based on secondary data sources, second section of the paper maps the systemic changes including student enrolment, teachers, and infrastructure between pre covid and covid period. Section III maps both Union Government and select state governments policy initiatives in the last year towards improving the learning
deficit and strengthening the school education system. An analysis of government financing for
school education has been carried out in section IV to see whether there is adequate budgetary
supports towards addressing educational poverty which emerged during the pandemic. Section V concludes.
I. Literature Review

Remote Education: Learning Loss

The process and outcomes of virtual learning during the pandemic have shed light on the learning loss incurred by millions of students, along with questions about the quality of education, accessibility gap and usage gap. Broadly, there were two types of learning loss. First, what the children could have learnt if the situation was normal. Second, what they have forgotten from what they knew when the schools closed. Pattnaik et. al. (2023) discuss how a lack of group learning strategies in session and children's lack of access to devices depersonalized the learning process for many children during the pandemic. Additionally, studies noted that many children felt disconnected, distracted, and uncomfortable interacting with their teachers via online platforms.

Pattnaik et. al. (2023) noted that the learning loss incurred by the students was also due to the unavailability of digital devices for many students. Many students did not have access to devices (laptops/computers/mobile phones) which was cited as the main reason for the low attendance of students in the virtual classrooms regularly. The financial struggles faced by parents due to the loss of their jobs faced hurdles in buying internet data or paying school fees to support their children's education Pattnaik et. al. (2023). The study also highlighted the need for the presence of parents, at least initially during online classes, and the lack of which affects the children's learning as many students struggle with using apps or virtual platforms. Pattnaik et. al. (2023) concludes that learning loss is evident in all socio-economic classes but is heightened in the case of students belonging to lower strata. As of June 30, 2021, nearly 29.6 million children have no access to digital devices across multiple states and union territories (Raut & Huy, 2022). In their study, Raut & Huy (2022) identified a gender gap in accessing digital devices for learning, with girls shouldering more responsibilities doing household chores and thus having lesser access to digital devices for learning. Remote learning has only widened the learning gaps among children Pattnaik et. al. (2023).

The school closures boosted the drop rates among children. In India, the dropout rate across school ages was 4.6%, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 report (Pratham, 2021). According to the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report, in India, around 108 million children were out of school from pre-primary to higher secondary section due to non-enrollment during 2020-21 alone (Raut & Huy, 2022). In rural areas, the school enrollment scenario is startling. According to a report by the School Team (2022), from their survey of 1400 children across 15 states and UTs, only 28% of the students were studying regularly during the survey, while nearly 50% of the surveyed children were unable to read more than a few words. During the closure, mid-day meals also faced a setback. Only a minority of households received cash; a large proportion did not receive anything. The survey also revealed that those families that received food reported receiving less than what they were entitled to; the norm is 100gm per child per day (The School Team, 2022).

In some instances, children also lost specific linguistic and mathematical abilities in primary classes regarding reading fluency, problem-solving skills, and basic mathematical operations.
compared to previous years. The National Achievement Survey by Ministry of Education (MoE) found that learning outcomes in mathematics and language in Class 3, 5 and 8 had dropped in 2021, compared with 2017. A report by Azim Premji University, 2021, suggests that, on average, 92% of the children from the study sample have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all classes. Similarly, 82% of children had lost at least one specific mathematical ability from the previous year across all the classes. The report findings also underlined how most government school teachers were also concerned about the extent of students’ learning loss and the social loss during school closure.

A report from Azim Premji Foundation (2020) also reflected on learning loss and the challenges faced by the teachers during the lockdowns and aftermath of COVID-19. The report noted that more than 80% of teachers expressed that no meaningful assessment of children’s learning in virtual mode was possible. Additionally, more than 50% of students needed help to complete the assignments during online classes leading to gaps in learning. According to a report by UNICEF (2021), from the surveyed sample, 50% of the teachers spent more money on teaching materials than pre-pandemic, and 9% of the teachers had additional duties for which a significant proportion of them did not receive any compensation from the government. The government teachers also lacked computer access which further deepened the learning crisis and revealed the lack of infrastructure in schools.

Aside from the learning loss incurred by the students, the remote learning also had other consequences and impact on the children. Many studies have highlighted how the learning loss caused due to the school closures impacted the mental health of the students. Further, the shutdown of schools also put many girls at the risk of child marriages. Some instances of violence, abuse against children was also reported.

**Disproportionate impact on children from marginalized communities**

Various surveys have shown that marginalized children hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is increase in learning disparities especially among adolescent girls, Children from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities, children with disabilities (CWD), children affected by conflict and displacement, migrant children, children from religious minorities. They were facing more risk of disengaging from learning.

Moscvoiz & Evans (2022) argue that the learning loss is consistently much higher among students from lower socio-economic classes in high-, middle-, and low-income countries. The study argues that the pandemic aggravated already existing learning inequality.

Several studies point out that students in rural areas face significant difficulties accessing education due to the lack of adequate facilities and support systems and among the rural population, mostly children belonging to the SC/ST lagged in learning. The School Team (2022) reported that among the surveyed children, only 4% of the SC/ST children were studying regularly compared to 15% of the children in rural areas. 43% of the SC/ST students could not study at all, and 83% of parents of the SC/ST students felt that their children’s reading and learning abilities had declined. On the contrary, 66% of parents of the dominant caste children agreed to the decline in the children’s reading and writing abilities (The School Team).
Moreover, nearly 50% of the SC/ST children could read only a few letters. The situation was
difficult even for children studying in model schools like Eklavya Residential Model schools
(ERMS). As per the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, the
students enrolled in ERMS did not get any online support like education kits, textbooks, facilities of
computer lab etc. on time and that impacted their learning immensely (Sharma, 2022).

The worst affected among these are CWD. The key factor responsible was non-availability of
appropriate teaching learning materials during the pandemic. However, there is little data
available on the learning status of CWD during the pandemic. Data paucity is also there for
children belonging to religious minorities. Therefore, there is not adequate evidence to capture
the extent of vulnerability of these children during the pandemic.

Online classes and digital divide

Remote learning demands digital devices, good-quality internet connectivity, and knowledge
about using apps/study portals. However, many students did not have access to smartphones
or laptops or had the monetary means to support digital learning. Lack of access to digital
devices posed a massive impediment to remote learning for many students, leading to loss of
learning. Many students struggled to cope with the new learning mode, i.e., virtual classrooms.
In some cases, students used the devices but not for learning purposed. A UNICEF study
conducted across six states- Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh,
surveyed close to 6000 students. The study underlined the digital divide crisis. Close to 10% of
the students did not have smartphones, TV, laptops/computers for any purpose within or
outside the households (UNICEF, 2021).

Furthermore, 40% of the students did not use the following materials for six months-
worksheets, textbooks, phones, laptops, radio, TV, or other means to continue remote learning.
The study’s findings also highlighted the regional disparity between rural and urban areas. For
instance, students in urban areas used more remote learning tools as compared to rural
students. The trends in the usage of remote learning tools also differed among private and
government schools. Although government schools opted for remote learning as much as
private schools, many private school students used technology-based tools for learning

On the contrary, usage of low-technology tools like TV is higher among government school
students by 3-14 % for elementary students. Usage of WhatsApp was the highest, followed by
textbooks for remote learning by the students (UNICEF, 2021). Further, the digital divide is
much starker among children belonging to migrant and tribal families. The students from
marginalized communities, SC, ST and migrant families reported lower usage of the devices
than the average.

There was also gender-based disparity noted in the usage of digital devices. Studies reported
that girl children had lesser accessibility to the digital tools as opposed to male students who
owned or had access to digital tools. Additionally, many low-income families reported that they
could not afford to recharge their phones for stable internet packs on regular basis or buy long-
term internet connectivity for their households.
Many students, teachers and parents faced difficulty in navigating the online portals to access materials, worksheets or conduct classes. Children belonging to pre-primary and primary sections especially had difficulty in the usage of apps and devices. In such cases, presence of at least one parent to help out the children became necessary. However, many parents could not be present at all times to help the children’s learning. Based on a report, 70% of the surveyed parents emphasized that online classes have not been a very effective tool for their children’s learning. 36% of the parents shared that their children were unable to use the apps on their own. In many instances, the students were not provided with teaching-learning materials prior to the online classes (Azim Premji University, 2020).

In April 2020, the Ministry of Human Resource Development announced the Alternative Academic Calendar (AAC) guidelines to continue formal online education for the academic year 2020-21 (UNICEF, 2022). However, the AAC erroneously assumed that schools are equipped with infrastructure to facilitate online learning. The extensive evidence suggests that many schools, especially government schools across the states, needed an established digital ecosystem to transition from offline to online learning mode smoothly. An Oxfam report highlighted that government schools were hit the hardest as more than 80% of government school students in Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh did not receive any educational materials during the lockdown. Despite this, studies suggested that a considerable number of children migrated to public schools following the pandemic as many parents could not afford the exorbitant fees of private schools (Vyas & Taneja, n.d).

**Out-of-School Children**

The dropout rates also increased among school-going children during the school closure. Many children became part of the workforce and became labourers. In 2021, a study released by the Campaign Against Child Labour stated that the proportion of working children in marginalized communities rose by 280% in Tamil Nadu compared to pre-pandemic years (Hamid & Poorvaja, 2022).

Raut & Huy (2022) underlines the factors affecting high dropout rates among children. These include looming economic disparities, food shortages, and reverse migration due to the impact of covid-19, further distancing the children from education. Raut & Huy (2022) further argues that a disproportionate rise in girls dropping out is expected. The ASER (2018) report pointed out that pre-pandemic, nearly 2.5% of children aged 6-14 years were not enrolled in schools. However, in 2020 and 2021, the figure doubled and stood at 4.6% (Hamid & Poorvaja, 2022). Several studies have reported an increase in out-of-school students. A UNICEF (2021) report stated that among the surveyed children, 8% of the students were not likely to return to school in the next three months or after; health-related concerns were cited as the reason for discontinuing learning by 60% of the students. Moreover, 4% of the students were unlikely to return to school after three months (UNICEF, 2021).
II. Mapping of select educational indicators pre-COVID and during COVID period

Re-opening of Schools and State-led Initiatives

Several studies have recommended re-opening of schools to curb the learning loss that the children have faced during the lockdown. The UNICEF report (2021) suggests to roll out re-enrollment campaigns, monitor the schools and build trust within the parents to send their children back to schools. The report suggests the government at the state level to converge with department of health and release guidelines for safe integration of students to the schools. Many other studies, suggest financial support to families so that they can continue to support the children’s education. Beside this, a significant portion of parents agree that sending their children back to schools will have a positive outcome on their learning and count it as a feasible solution. As the schools are reopening, it is vital to continue tracking and understand the differential schooling experience of children coming from different backgrounds. In this connection, it is also important to see how schools were equipped to deal with such situation. The section focuses on three key educational indicators –School, Teacher and Infrastructure to capture the situational and systemic change took place during covid period as compared to the pre-covid year.

Change in enrolment

During the pandemic, education of more than 320 million children in India were impacted for almost two years. However, except students appearing for board exams in class X and class XII, students from all classes in the government and government aided schools were promoted to the next class. The following graph tried to capture the transition of students between 2019-20 – the pre-pandemic year and 2021-22- the second year of pandemic. It has been assumed that all children enrolled in class I in 2019-20 got promoted to class III in 2021-22 and a similar trend for the other class.

Figure 1: Transition of students from 2019-20 to 2021-22

Source: UDISE+ data, several years.
A class wise gender disaggregated enrolment data for 2019-20 and 2021-22 for shows that except class IV and class VIII, in all other classes, especially at the secondary and higher secondary level, a large number of children discontinued their study. Incidence of drop out is more at the secondary and higher secondary level. While girls outnumbered boys at secondary level, the picture reverses at the higher secondary level.

**Change in schools**

A similar picture appears for number of schools. In the two years of pandemic, number of government and government aided schools declined from 11.36 lakh to 11.25 lakh and private schools both recognized and unrecognized reduced from 3.71 lakh to 3.64 lakh. It could be a result of merger as well as school closure.

**Figure 2: Change in the number of schools in 2021-22 from 2019-20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Name</th>
<th>Pre-Primary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Upper Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt. and govt. aided</td>
<td>-2066</td>
<td>42591</td>
<td>-47034</td>
<td>64570</td>
<td>34420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-5022</td>
<td>13289</td>
<td>-23859</td>
<td>39965</td>
<td>26964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UDISE+ data, several years.*

**Change in teachers**

**Table 1: Change in the number of teachers in 2021-22 from 2019-20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Name</th>
<th>Pre-Primary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Upper Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt. and govt. aided</td>
<td>-2066</td>
<td>42591</td>
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<td>64570</td>
<td>34420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-5022</td>
<td>13289</td>
<td>-23859</td>
<td>39965</td>
<td>26964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UDISE+ data, several years.*
The role of teachers became very important during the pandemic. They were not only seen as educator but also mentor to students in providing psycho-social support to children in distress. A comparison of presence of teachers in pre-COVID and the COVID period portrays a relatively positive scenario in both government and government aided schools as well as private schools. Except pre-primary and upper primary level, for other levels of school education, number of teachers have increased from the pre-covid year.

During the reopening school, the other key area which required additional attention was infrastructure, especially a basic WASH (water, sanitation and handwash) infrastructure and adequate space in school and classrooms to maintain safe distance. Fortunately, there was substantial improvement in WASH infrastructure both in government and aided schools as well as private schools. Table 2 shows the increase in number of schools with electricity connection, both boys and girls’ toilets, drinking water and hand wash facility etc by school management. The decline in number of schools conducted medical check up could be due to school closure during COVID-19. An improvement in digital infrastructure in terms of computer and internet connection was also observed between 2019-20 and 2021-22.

**Change in WASH infrastructure**

**Table 2: Change in WASH infrastructure in 2021-22 from 2019-20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Management</th>
<th>Functional Electricity</th>
<th>Functional Boy’s Toilet</th>
<th>Functional Girl’s Toilet</th>
<th>Functional Drinking Water</th>
<th>Water Purifier Facility</th>
<th>Hand wash</th>
<th>WASH</th>
<th>Medical Checkup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt. and govt. aided</td>
<td>75951</td>
<td>4783</td>
<td>3445</td>
<td>13757</td>
<td>18868</td>
<td>29055</td>
<td>44359</td>
<td>-335799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>4658</td>
<td>1571</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>7700</td>
<td>4915</td>
<td>10865</td>
<td>-92384</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UDISE+ data, several years.*

**Change in digital infrastructure**

**Table 3: Change in digital infrastructure in 2021-22 from 2019-20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Management</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Computer Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt. and govt. aided</td>
<td>137863</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>31244</td>
<td>8864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UDISE+ data, several years.*
III. Mapping of Union Government and State-led policy Initiatives

**Union Government led policy initiatives**

Both Union and state governments have introduced several programs and initiatives to promote digital learning during the lockdown. The Union government has created repositories such as DIKSHA- a digital infrastructure for school education. The portal has video lessons, assignments, worksheets in multiple languages. Other learning repositories include SWAYAM portal, and e-Pathashala, Pragyatha, NISHTHA, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) that aims to preserve and give access to a variety of digital resources for students and teachers. To improve the learning level of children studying in Balvatika to class VIII, Union Government launched 100 days reading campaign 'Padhe Bharat' between January 1 to April 10, 2022. Some other initiatives taken by the Union government to ease the digital learning during the lockdown included learning programs on TV, radio and through WhatsApp groups. In 2020, the HRD Ministry indicated the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to introduce text books with QR codes in an effort to digitize the textbooks. The bar code will be used to provide access to information through smartphone (Sharma, 2020). However, many students reported that the QR codes were not readable and faced technical hurdles (Gole, 2022). NCERT has developed bridge course modules for out-of-school children including various activities which are helpful for bridging the learning gaps. To understand the impact of the pandemic, NCERT is also going to conduct 'Interactive' survey with Class 3 students to assess learning loss.

**State led policy initiatives**

**Table 4: Policy initiatives taken by states in 2021-22 and 2022-23**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Maharashtra | - Maharashtra's School Education and Sports Department has partnered with Khan Academy India to improve math learning outcomes for students across classes 1-10 in government schools in the state.  
- Maharashtra will follow Kerala model of education in school education from the next academic year. The department will bring exams back to schools at regular intervals from Class III onwards, followed by remedial teaching and re-exams to gauge the students' development. |
<p>| Rajasthan   | - The Rajasthan Council of School Education (RCSE) and Sampark Foundation have signed an agreement for five years to improve the quality of learning of 37 lakh children in around 65,000 primary schools in Rajasthan. In the first phase of the programme, a total of eight districts will be covered including five aspirational districts - Dholpur, Sirohi, Baran, Karauli, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner and Jaipur. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>State Initiatives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Sampark Foundation is expected to invest up to Rs 40 crore, to increase the learning outcome of children enrolled in the government schools in the 33 districts of Rajasthan in subjects such as Mathematics and English for Classes 1 to 5 and Science in Classes 6 to 8 by 10% during the first year and a 30% increase by the fifth year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tamil Nadu - a new mobile application designed in order to identify and cater to the needs of out of school children who dropped out during the COVID-19 pandemic period; a large-scale door-to-door survey was conducted in all habitations from Aug-Oct, 2021.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tamil Nadu - Illam Thedi Kalvi (Education at Doorstep) – a flagship programme of state government to bridge the learning gaps with the help of volunteers who teach the students after school hours in the neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tamil Nadu - Infusing technology in administrative work in terms of digitization of register in order to supplement the efforts of teachers in the teaching learning process and in the discharge of their administrative duties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- West Bengal - Paray Shikhalaya - an initiative to support children to cope with school closure introduced teaching-learning session at community and habitation level by taking the school to the learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- West Bengal - Specially designed 84 Bridge course materials developed to facilitate students to cover learning loss.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, as the evidence suggests, many states do not have a robust digital eco system to provide for the digital infrastructure. Hence, many students despite these initiatives could not access the information and succumbed to learning loss.
IV. Mapping of Budgetary interventions to address learning recovery

The MoE received allocation of Rs. 93,224 crore for 2021-22 (BE). The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) was allotted Rs. 54,874 crore for 2021-22 (BE); reduction by 8.3% as compared to 2020-21 (BE). The Union Budget for 2022-23 has allocated Rs. 1,04,277 crore for the MoE, of which Rs. 62,566.2 crore (61%) is allotted for the DSEL. The dept. has witnessed a 16% increase in allocation from 2021-22 (BE).

An analysis of Union government budget speech for 2021-22 did not reflect any COVID-responsive measures for school education by the MoE. The following were some of the key interventions highlighted in the budget speech that had implications on improving learning.

1) Standards will be developed for all school teachers in the form of National Professional Standards for Teachers- NPST. This will be followed by all 92 lakh teachers of public and private school system in the country.

2) A National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR) to be set up within the context of a Digital First Mindset where the Digital Architecture to support teaching and learning activities and also educational planning, governance and administrative activities of the Union and the States/Union Territories.

3) In 2021-22, training of 56 lakh school teachers through the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers for Holistic Advancement (NISTHA) to be enabled.

In 2022-23, the following measures related to improving digital infrastructure were announced, but most of the intervention do not have any budgetary implications. 'One class-one
TV channel programme of PM e-VIDYA to be expanded from 12 to 200 TV channels. This will enable all states to provide supplementary education in regional languages for classes 1-12.

- In vocational courses, to promote crucial critical thinking skills, to give space for creativity, 750 virtual labs in science and mathematics, and 75 skilling e-labs for simulated learning environment, will be set-up in 2022-23.

- High-quality e-content in all spoken languages to be developed for delivery via internet, mobile phones, TV and radio through Digital Teachers.

- A competitive mechanism for development of quality e-content by the teachers will be set-up to empower and equip them with digital tools of teaching and facilitate better learning outcomes.

- It clearly shows that efforts were concentrated largely on digital interventions in the line of NEP recommendations while no allocational priorities observed for indicators crucial to address education loss like remedial classes, teachers’ training, surveys to identify out of school children, financial assistance to students in the form of scholarships etc.

However, budgetary priorities at the state level showed a mixed picture. A comparative analysis of the financing pattern of select states towards school education between 2020-21 and 2022-23 has been presented below.

**Maharashtra**

**Figure 4: Allocation and expenditure on school education in Maharashtra (Rs. Crore)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>60605</td>
<td>54810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>61316</td>
<td>53785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>62901</td>
<td>60146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>66886</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The actual figure for 2021-22 is the revised estimates.*

*Source: Maharashtra state budget, various years.*

The allocation to school education has increased gradually from 2019 to 2022 with elementary education receiving higher budgetary allocations than secondary education. Within elementary education assistance to local bodies and assistance to Zilla Parishad have received higher allocations. In FY 2019-20 (BE), Rs. 435.9 crore was allocated to Special Component Plan
for Scheduled Castes; no allocation were made during the pandemic years or in FY 2022-23 under this component. The state share for the STARS program assisted by World Bank is also null in the past five years. Similarly, no budgetary allocation has been made to Special Facilities to Scheduled Castes/Tribes Students in Primary Schools of Zilla Parishads (Scheme) in the last five years. Moreover, no expenditure was reported under govt primary school component from FY 2019-20 to FY 2021-22. A budgetary allocation of Rs. 25 crore was allotted in FY 2022-23 (BE); which is less than 82% as compared to FY 2021-22 is (RE). Under secondary education, higher allocations have been made under ‘Assistance to Non-Government Secondary Schools and Junior Colleges’.

**Rajasthan**

**Figure 5: Allocation and expenditure on school education in Rajasthan (Rs. Crore)**

![Figure 5](image)

*Note: The actual figure for 2021-22 is the revised estimates.
Source: Rajasthan state budget, various years.*

In the past five years, secondary education has been given higher allocations than elementary education. In the case of elementary education, allocation saw an increase during the pandemic with Rs. 12931 crore in FY 2020-21 (BE) and Rs. 13682 crore in FY 2021-22 (BE) as compared to Rs. 12856 crore in FY 2019-20 (BE) (pre-pandemic). However, the budgetary allocation decreased for secondary education during the pandemic with allocation of Rs. 19863 crore in FY 2020-21 (BE) while in FY 2019-20 (BE) the allocation was Rs. 20254 crore. Under elementary education, expenditure towards Assistance to Block level/Intermediate level Panchayats has been the highest among all the other components. Under the Scholarships and Incentives category, the budgetary allocation decreased in FY 2022-23 (BE) by 23.77% as compared to pre-pandemic year. Moreover, the state share in the National Program of the Mid-Day Meal in Schools also witnessed a decline in FY 2021-22 (BE) by 50% and in FY 2022-23 (BE) by 45.3% as compared to the pre-pandemic year. Under Secondary Educations, the scholarships component has witnessed an increase during the pandemic years by 8.5% in FY 2020-21(BE) and by 10.14% in FY 2021-22 (BE) as compared to the pre-pandemic year, FY
2019-20 (BE). Under Secondary Education, major allocations have been made to government secondary schools. Within the government secondary schools, higher expenditures are made towards government boys secondary schools than government girls secondary schools. Allocation towards Model Schools in FY 2022-23 (BE) rose by 53.3% as compared to pre-pandemic year. However, during the pandemic, provisions like Special Organisation Scheme for Scheduled Castes saw a decline as compared to the pre-pandemic year but has seen an increase in allocation in FY 2022-23 (BE).

**Tamil Nadu**

In the last 5 years, budgetary allocation to school education has steadily increased with the FY 2022-23 (BE) witnessing the highest allocation so far with Rs. 36895 crore followed by in FY 2020-21, where the allocation was Rs. 34180 crore. In the case of Tamil Nadu, budgetary allocation indicates that secondary education has been prioritised over elementary education. Overall, the allocations in both elementary and secondary education has increased during the pandemic years as compared to the pre-pandemic year. Under elementary education, major allocation is made towards government primary schools with higher allocations made in FY 2022-23 with Rs. 11,046 crore and during the pandemic in FY 2020-21 (BE) with Rs. 10,110.58 crore. However, in FY 2022-23 (BE), Samagra Shiksha was allotted Rs. 1702.4 crore which is lower than in FY 2021-22 (BE) where the expenditure stood at Rs. 1783 crore.

**Figure 6: Allocation and expenditure on school education in Tamil Nadu (Rs. Crore)**

![Bar chart showing budget estimates and actual figures for Tamil Nadu's school education from 2019-20 to 2022-23.]

*Note:* The actual figure for 2021-22 is revised estimates.

*Source:* Tamil Nadu state budget, various years.

Provisions like supply of bags and other learning materials to government and government aided schools which had no mention in the pre-pandemic year has seen an increase in the allocation by 18% in FY 2022-23 (BE) as compared to FY 2021-22 (BE). Under secondary education, in the last five years, allocation toward maintenance of buildings has been made only once in FY 2022-23. Regarding scholarships, the allocation in FY 2022-23 (BE) and FY 2021-22
(BE) dropped by 8.5% as compared to the pre-pandemic year in FY 2019-20 (BE); In 2020-21 (BE) the allocation was the same as the pre-pandemic year. Under the secondary education, highest allocations have been made to government secondary schools.

**West Bengal**

**Figure 7: Allocation and expenditure on school education (Rs. Crore)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>27459</td>
<td>26875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>29956</td>
<td>30144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>35205</td>
<td>31159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>34936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The actual figure for 2021-22 is the revised estimates.*  
*Source: West Bengal state budget, various years.*

Unlike other states, West Bengal government spent higher amount on school education during the pandemic years than the pre-pandemic year. In fact, between 2019-20 and 2022-23, the allocation for the school education sector has increased by 27%. Of the total school education budget, in 2022-23, the share of secondary education is 52% and elementary education 48%. This ratio was 56:44 in 2021-22. However, a component wise distribution of budget shows that larger chunk of resources in West Bengal going as assistance to non-government primary and secondary schools, and the budgetary increase in pandemic years from the previous year is largely on account of higher resource allocation towards this head. However, resource allocated for some of the interventions like teachers’ training, text books, scholarships etc. which were crucial for learning recovery, not being utilized fully. For example, in 2021-22, Rs. 358 crore was allocated for textbooks, but only Rs. 127 crore was spent. Similarly, of a total allocation for Rs. seven crore on scholarships only Rs. 3 crore was spent. While the budget for Samagra Shiksha and Mid-day meal has increased between 2019-20 and 2021-22, a decrease in utilization observed during 2021-22. The capital expenditure on school education has reduced substantially between pre-COVID and COVID years. In 2019-20, while the capital outlay was Rs. 576 crore, it has declined to Rs. 202 crore in 2021-22(BE).

**Spending on marginalised communities**

Children from marginalized communities especially SC and ST students suffered a lot during the pandemic due to various reasons. Historically children from these communities are vulnerable and the pandemic has increased their vulnerability manifold. As they are highly dependent on public service delivery of school education, it is important to see how different
governments have supported these students in the last three years. One of the avenues to support the education of SC and ST students is allocating and spending resources under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), Special Component Plan for SCs and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP). The following table shows the trend of spending on SCSP and TSP components by Dept. of School Education in the select study states.

Table 5: Spending under Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) (Rs. Crore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019-20 (BE)</th>
<th>2019-20 (A)</th>
<th>2020-21 (BE)</th>
<th>2020-21 (A)</th>
<th>2021-22 (BE)</th>
<th>2021-22 (RE)</th>
<th>2022-23 (BE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>476.0</td>
<td>309.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>3768</td>
<td>2884</td>
<td>3607</td>
<td>2617</td>
<td>3629</td>
<td>3661</td>
<td>4281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>2,527</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>2,740</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>2,820</td>
<td>2,030</td>
<td>2,916</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Budget documents, various years.

In Maharashtra, of the total enrolled children in school, 24% are SC and ST students. While, in the pre-pandemic year, the spending under these two heads were Rs. 309 crore, there is a drastic drop in the allocation in the subsequent years. A token amount of Rs. 0.1 crore allocation even in 2022-23 questions the implementation of the programme in the state. 35% of school enrolled children in Rajasthan are from SC and ST communities. While the state spends a substantial amount on SCSP and TSP component, spending during pandemic shows a substantial decline. In Tamil Nadu, while the state share for TSP under secondary education has increased in the last five years, the overall expenditure under SCSP and TSP components has declined during the pandemic in FY 2021-22 (BE) and also in FY 2022-23 (BE), as compared to the allocation during the COVID period. Similarly, the expenditure of Special Central Assistance for TSP has also declined during the pandemic in FY 2021-22 (BE) and in FY 2022-23 (BE). Around one-third of total enrolled children in West Bengal are from SC and ST communities. While over time the state has increased the allocation under these components, there is a decrease in spending during 2020-21 as compared to pre-pandemic year, i.e, 2019-20.

**Union Government and State Governments interventions through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA)**

Union government’s COVID-response measures were largely implemented through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA), the key centrally sponsored scheme for school education, responsible for interventions including distribution of text books, uniforms, stipend for disabled girl children, identification of out of school children (OOSC) and mainstreaming them in the system. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved continuation of SMSA from 1st April 2021 to 31st March, 2026 with an estimated central outlay of Rs. 1,85,398 crore. In this
line of approval, the scheme has been allocated Rs. 37383 crore. While this is a 20% increase from the previous year budget estimate (see Figure 8), but lesser than the pre-pandemic level allocation of Rs. 38751 crore (in 2020-21 BE). Moreover, in the first year of COVID (2020-21), when more resource support was required, central release of the fund remained 71%.

**Figure 8: Union Government spending on SMSA (Rs. Crore)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019-20 BE</th>
<th>2020-21 BE</th>
<th>2021-22 Actual</th>
<th>2022-23 BE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>36322</td>
<td>38751</td>
<td>31050</td>
<td>37383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>32377</td>
<td>27835</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>32377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>27835</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>27835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>30000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Figure for 2021-22 Actual is Revised estimates for 2021-22.*

*Source: Union Budget, various years.*

In line with the suggestion of the Union governments, states have also adopted a number of interventions as learning recovery plan in 2022-23 under SMSA. The following are some select interventions highlighted by the study states in their Annual Workplan and Budget,

- A five-year perspective plan covering all interventions of SMSA
- Annual calendar of activities to achieve objectives
- Adoption of NCERT developed bridge course materials for out of school children
- Distribution of learning enhancement package to all students towards restoration of normal learning in the beginning of 2022-23 academic calendar and financial assistance of Rs. 500 to students at upper primary and secondary level.
- Financial assistance of Rs. 10000 to teachers at primary level to buy tablet as teacher resource package for innovation
- Prioritising foundational learning under NIPUN Bharat
Figure 9: Approved allocation for SMSA in select states (Rs. Crore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2019-20</th>
<th>2020-21</th>
<th>2021-22</th>
<th>2022-23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>2532</td>
<td>1484</td>
<td>1524</td>
<td>2095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>5038</td>
<td>4222</td>
<td>4798</td>
<td>5290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>3171</td>
<td>3162</td>
<td>3010</td>
<td>3204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>4249</td>
<td>4147</td>
<td>3557</td>
<td>2711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PAB minutes, SMSA portal, various years.

However, state-wise budgetary allocation approved by PAB shows a similar pattern. All the four states, show a lesser allocation towards the scheme during COVID period compared to 2019-20, the pre-pandemic year. While Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have higher approved outlay in 2022-23, West Bengal showing a declining trend in approval as the outlay approved to West Bengal under non-recurring expenditure in the previous year was not spent fully.
V. Conclusions

School closure in India for almost two years and associated ineffective online learning had severely impacted a large number of students especially those are from marginalized communities. School closures resulted in significant learning losses are now being corroborated by real data. In the analysis, we have seen how the pandemic resulted in drop-in transition rate and increased number of dropped out children. Those still continuing are experiencing learning deficit. This is not a temporary challenge but has a long-lasting effect on country’s future generation and hence country’s socio-economic development. According to a report published by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF, there could be around 14% of global GDP loss as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures. Thus, there is a need of more active efforts from both Union and State governments to devise strategies that can bridge learning gaps and improve learning.

A thorough analysis of government initiatives during the pandemic years show that there were a number of policy interventions to implement remote learning as an alternative to face-to-face learning. However, the coverage and quality of such efforts were not adequate. Moreover, the policies in many cases were not guided by evidences. While every survey including governments’ own surveys highlighted acute digital divide, the implemented policies tried to address the issue of learning recovery largely through digital interventions. While much more resources were required to address learning recovery, neither Union government nor the select state governments allocated any COVID-induced stimulus package for education. In fact, the allocation for school education in the years of COVID was lesser than pre-COVID year. Government’s key scheme for holistic school education – SMSA also witnessed budget cut at the Union level as well as state level. In 2022-23, with the reopening of schools while there was some increase in resource allocation, the amount is not adequate to even restore normalcy.

Research from other countries suggests that personalizing instruction could be the most effective ways of improving learning while making judicious use of existing educational resources. Therefore, role of teachers is critical to compensate the loss of learning. Teachers will have to be given enough time. Without adequate additional teaching time, it is unrealistic to expect teachers and students to be able to cope with the learning deficits. Even with this extra time, teachers and students will require relevant support, for example, training and tools for the teachers to assess quickly the levels of academic regression for each student. However, no additional investment is observed towards teachers’ education, teachers’ recruitment, monetary and non-monetary incentives to children for retaining them in the system.

To build more resilient education systems for the long-term, government need to invest adequately to create an enabling environment for learning. Training of teachers is crucial to improve learning loss. Thus, policy should prioritise higher allocation towards offline teachers’ training for a longer period with a revamped module incorporating the experiences required to deal with COVID-19 like emergency. Role of community is important in supporting children’s schooling and learning. Therefore, significant allocation for community mobilization and training of school development management committee members is need of the hour.
References


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Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), an independent think tank based in Delhi, analyses public policies and budgets in India and advocates greater transparency, accountability and scope for participation in budgets. For further information about CBGA's work, please visit www.cbgaindia.org or write to us at: info@cbgaindia.org.

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CRY - Child Rights and You (formerly known as Child Relief and You) is an Indian NGO that believes in every child’s right to a childhood - to live, to learn, grow and play. For over 30 years, CRY and its partners have worked with parents and communities to ensure Lasting Change in the lives of more than 20 lakh underprivileged children.

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