



India's Education Indicator in the Human Development Index – 2025: Status, Analysis and Suggestive Measures

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Abstract:

This study examines India's education indicator within the Human Development Index (HDI) as reported in the 2025 Human Development Report. Using secondary data from UNDP reports and related analyses, it describes India's current performance—13 expected years of schooling and 6.9 mean years of schooling—showing steady quantitative gains since 1990 but persistent gaps compared to high-HDI countries. The analysis identifies positive drivers such as the Right to Education Act 2009, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and National Education Policy 2020, which expanded access and retention. However, challenges including poor learning outcomes, urban-rural disparities, low public spending (3.1% of GDP), and COVID-19-induced digital divides constrain progress. Key causal factors span policy implementation gaps, socioeconomic barriers, and inequality. Recommendations include raising education expenditure to 6% of GDP, scaling foundational literacy programmes like NIPUN Bharat, targeted equity measures for marginalised groups, and bridging digital gaps through localised EdTech. These reforms can strengthen India's Education Index and overall HDI trajectory towards high human development.

Keywords: Human Development Index, Education Indicator, India, 2025, NEP 2020, SDG 4 (Quality Education).

Introduction:

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure which goes beyond income and looks at broader aspects of development, such as health, education, and standard of living (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025a). It reflects how far people in a country are able to live long, knowledgeable, and decent lives. In the 2025 Human Development Report, India is placed at 130 out of 193 countries, with an HDI value of 0.685, and continues to fall in the medium human development category (UNDP, 2025b). At the same time, India's education indicators in HDI—expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling—have increased over time, but serious concerns remain about quality, inequality, and learning outcomes (Raj et al., 2024; Prasad et al., 2025).

This paper focuses on the education component of HDI in India. It uses secondary data from UNDP and other credible sources to describe the present position i.e. 2025 cycle and data year 2023, analyse reasons behind the current performance, and suggest possible ways to strengthen India's education indicator in future HDI reports. The discussion is also linked with the aims of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To describe the current status of India's education indicators in the Human Development Index in 2025.
2. To analyse the major reasons behind India's performance in the education indicator of the Human Development Index in 2025.
3. To suggest measures for improving India's education indicator in the Human Development Index in the coming years.

Research Methodology:

The study is based on a secondary data, descriptive–analytical design. It relies on already published data and documents rather than primary fieldwork.

Human Development Index:

UNDP introduced the Human Development Index in 1990 to measure development in a more people-centred way, instead of using only economic indicators such as GDP (UNDP, 2025a). HDI combines three dimensions: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. This idea is strongly influenced by Amartya Sen's capability approach, which understands development as expansion of people's freedoms and opportunities (UNDP, 2010).

Since 2010, HDI has been calculated as the geometric mean of three dimension indices, after converting each underlying indicator to a 0–1 scale using fixed minimum and maximum values (UNDP, 2025a). This method recognises that poor performance in one dimension cannot be completely compensated by very high performance in another. The HDI value is then computed using the formula $HDI = (\text{Health Index} \times \text{Education Index} \times \text{Income Index})^{(1/3)}$ (UNDP, 2025a; UNdata, 2023). Countries are grouped into very high, high, medium, and low human development categories. With an HDI value of 0.685 in the 2025 report, India falls in the medium human development category, and the education dimension continues to be one of the relative weaknesses (UNDP, 2025b; Civildaily, 2025).

Three Indicators of Human Development Index:

The HDI is made up of three dimension indices, each having specific indicators (UNDP, 2025a):

- *Health dimension:* Measured by life expectancy at birth, with lower and upper bounds of 20 and 85 years.
- *Education dimension:* Measured through two indicators—mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and above (0 to 15 years), and expected years of schooling for a child of school-entry age (0 to 18 years). These two are combined to form the Education Index.
- *Income dimension:* Measured by gross national income (GNI) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, with values transformed using logarithms and bounded between 100 and 75,000 international dollars.

According to the objectives of this study researcher focused only on the status, analysis and suggestive measures to improve education index of HDI of India,

Status of Education Indicator in India's HDI (2025):

In the 2025 Human Development Report, which uses data mainly from 2023, India shows improvement in

both education indicators, though there is still a gap compared to many high-HDI countries (UNDP, 2025b; forumias.com, n.d.).

- Expected years of schooling in India is reported as 13 years. This is a significant rise from 8.2 years in 1990 and 12.6 years in 2022, indicating that a child entering school today can expect, on average, to reach the upper secondary level (Dhyeya IAS, 2025; Sanskriti IAS, 2025).
- Mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and above is 6.9 years in 2023, up from about 3 years in 1990 and 6.6 years in 2022, which shows a gradual increase in the educational attainment of the adult population (forumias.com, n.d.; Civildaily, 2025).

These improvements contribute to the Education Index and, along with health and income indicators, to an overall HDI of 0.685 and India's rank of 130 out of 193 countries (UNDP, 2025b). Over the last three decades, the growth rate of India's education indicators has generally been faster than that of many other medium-HDI countries (Raj et al., 2024).

Analysis of Performance of India in Education Indicator of HDI 2025:

Positive Drivers

Several policy measures have supported the improvement in India's education indicators. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, made schooling a fundamental right for children between 6 and 14 years, and led to a drastic reduction in the number of out-of-school children at primary level (forumias.com, n.d.; Next IAS, 2025). Initiatives like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and different scholarship schemes have helped in improving enrolment and retention of children, especially from disadvantaged sections, thereby increasing expected years of schooling (Dhyeya IAS, 2025).

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has also given renewed attention to universal access, early childhood education, foundational literacy and numeracy, and flexible pathways up to secondary level. These reforms, though still in early stages, are expected to further support longer schooling journeys (Raj et al., 2024). At the same time, subnational analyses show that several lagging states have begun to catch up with more advanced states, which helps to raise the national average of education indicators (Singh & Mahajan, 2025).

Constraints and Challenges

However, the education dimension remains a key constraint for India's HDI. Although years of schooling have increased, mean years of schooling at 6.9 are still much lower than the 11–13 years typically seen in very high-HDI countries. Studies point out that learning levels, particularly in basic reading and mathematics, are worryingly low; only about one-quarter to one-third of students in Grade 5 can perform tasks expected at Grade 2 level (Prasad et al., 2025; Team, 2025).

Another serious concern is inequality. The HDI value for India is reduced by about one-third when adjusted for inequality, and educational inequality forms a major part of this loss (Garg et al., 2022; Staff, n.d.). There are wide gaps between urban and rural areas, richer and poorer households, and different social groups. For example, urban adults, on average, have significantly more years of schooling than rural adults, and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes often have 1–2 fewer years of schooling compared to the general category (Garg et al., 2022).

Public spending on education also remains below the target of 6 per cent of GDP suggested in policy documents like NEP 2020. Lower funding affects teacher availability, school infrastructure, and quality of teaching-learning processes (Raj et al., 2024). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic led to long school closures and reliance on online learning, which many poor and rural children could not access. This digital divide has added to existing inequalities and may have slowed progress in both schooling years and learning outcomes (Prasad et al., 2025).

Key Causal Factors

From the above discussion, three major sets of causal factors can be identified:

- *Policy and governance factors:* Programmes like RTE and Samagra Shiksha have expanded access, but uneven implementation, weak monitoring, and insufficient focus on learning quality reduce their full impact (Prasad et al., 2025).
- *Socioeconomic factors:* Poverty, child labour, and household economic shocks prevent many children, especially at secondary level, from continuing their education, which holds back mean years of schooling (Raj et al., 2024).
- *Inequality factors:* Differences across rural–urban areas, gender, caste, and religion strongly influence how long children stay in school and what they learn, thereby depressing both the Education Index and overall HDI (Garg et al., 2022).

Suggestive measures to India’s education indicator in HDI:

To strengthen India’s education indicator in HDI in the coming years, several steps are suggested in the literature. First, there is a clear need to raise public expenditure on education closer to 6 per cent of GDP and to direct these resources towards teacher recruitment and training, school infrastructure, and better learning materials (Team, 2025; Next IAS, 2025). Second, ongoing initiatives such as NIPUN Bharat, which focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, should be expanded and implemented rigorously across all states, along with regular assessment of learning outcomes (Raj et al., 2024). Third, more targeted interventions are required to reduce disparities: state-specific education improvement plans, special scholarships for SC, ST, girls, and poor households, and development of hostels and secondary schools in educationally backward blocks can help bridge gaps (Prasad et al., 2025; Singh & Mahajan, 2025). Fourth, policies must address the digital divide by ensuring reliable internet access, affordable devices, and appropriate digital content in Indian languages for rural and low-income learners. At the same time, vocational education and skill development should be integrated with general schooling, in line with NEP 2020, so that longer years of schooling also lead to better employment prospects (Vajiram and Ravi Institute for IAS Examination, n.d.). If these measures are planned and executed well, some studies suggest that India could see a further rise of 1–2 years in both expected and mean years of schooling over the next few years (Raj et al., 2024).

Conclusion:

India’s education indicators in HDI—13 expected years of schooling and 6.9 mean years of schooling—show clear progress over the last three decades and reflect successful efforts in expanding access to education (UNDP, 2025b; Prasad et al., 2025). However, continuing challenges related to learning quality, inequality, and inadequate funding mean that the education dimension still pulls down India’s overall HDI position.

For India to move from medium to higher human development levels, it will be essential not only to keep children in school for more years, but also to ensure that all children, irrespective of background, receive

meaningful and high-quality education. These reforms will also support India's progress towards SDG 4 (Quality Education) targets. Addressing regional and social disparities, improving school quality, and aligning education with labour market needs can help transform India's education indicator and, in turn, strengthen its human development performance in future reports.

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