



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**PROGRESS IN INDIA'S SCHOOL
EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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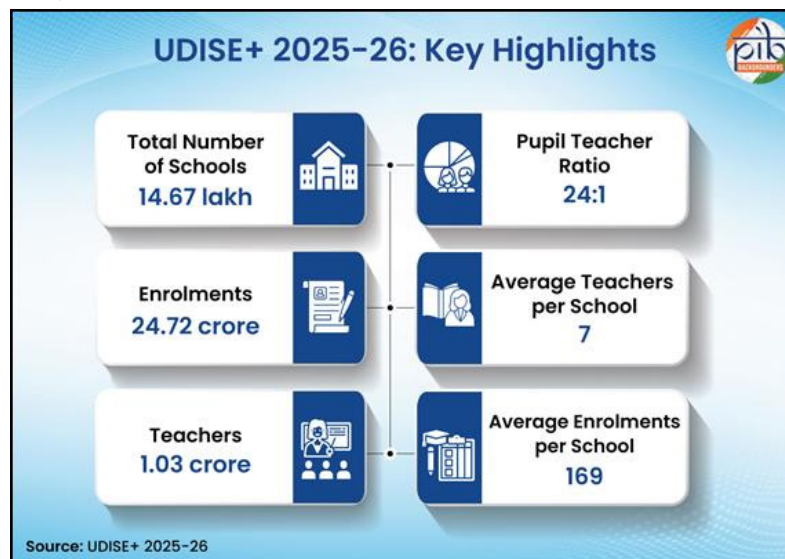
PROGRESS IN INDIA'S SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Context

- The **UDISE+ 2025–26 report** highlights substantial expansion in India's school education system while revealing persistent regional, social, infrastructure and teacher-related disparities.

About India's School Education System

- According to UDISE+ 2025–26, India has one of the world's largest school education systems, encompassing nearly **1.47 million schools, 24 crore students and 1.02 crore teachers**.



- The system spans foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary stages and involves government, aided and private institutions.
- The **Right to Education Act, 2009** guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 years.
 - However, the contemporary challenge has shifted from merely expanding access to ensuring **retention, learning outcomes, equity and quality**.

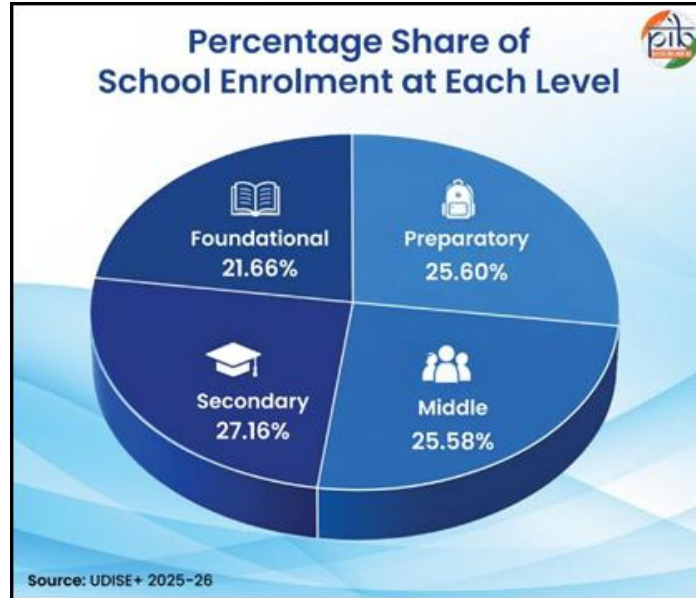
Constitutional & Policy Perspectives

- Education is in the **Concurrent List (Entry 25)**, enabling both the Union and States to legislate and implement policies.
- Key constitutional provisions include:
 - Article 21A:** Right to free and compulsory education for 6–14-year-olds.
 - Article 45:** Early childhood care and education.
 - Article 46:** Promotion of educational and economic interests of SCs, STs and weaker sections.
 - Article 15(4) & 15(5):** Special provisions for disadvantaged social groups in education.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** seeks universal foundational literacy and numeracy, multidisciplinary learning, vocational exposure, technology integration and equitable access.

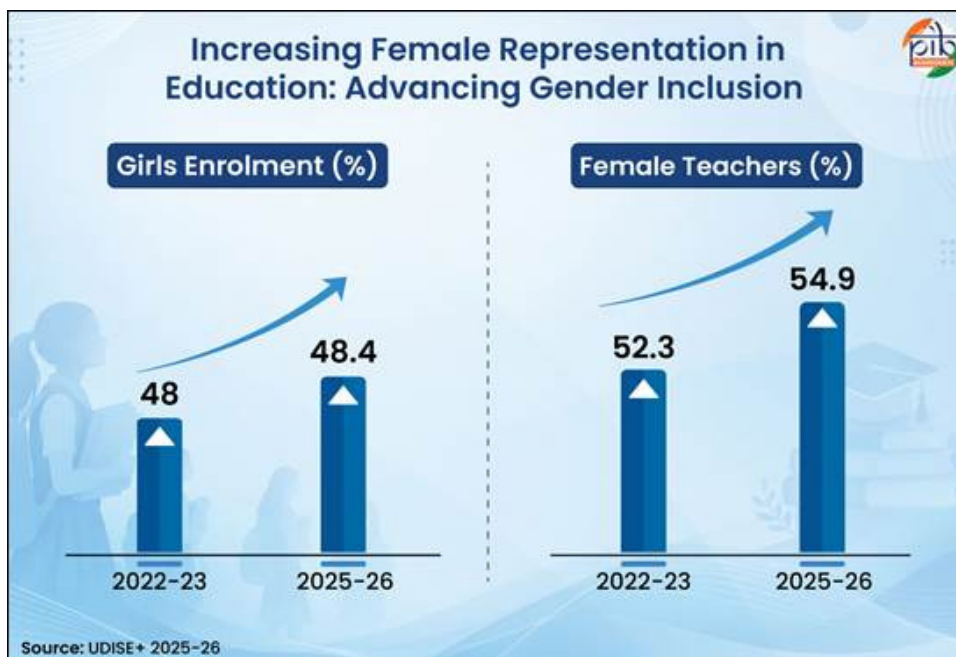
Key Findings of UDISE+ 2025–26

- Expansion With Uneven Access:** School participation and retention have improved, but geographical disparities remain pronounced.

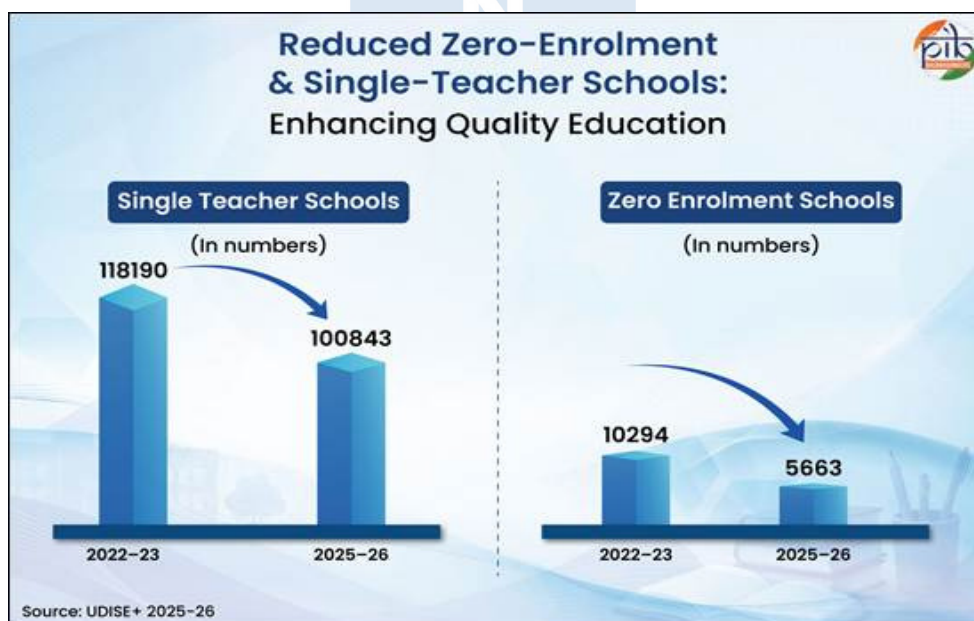
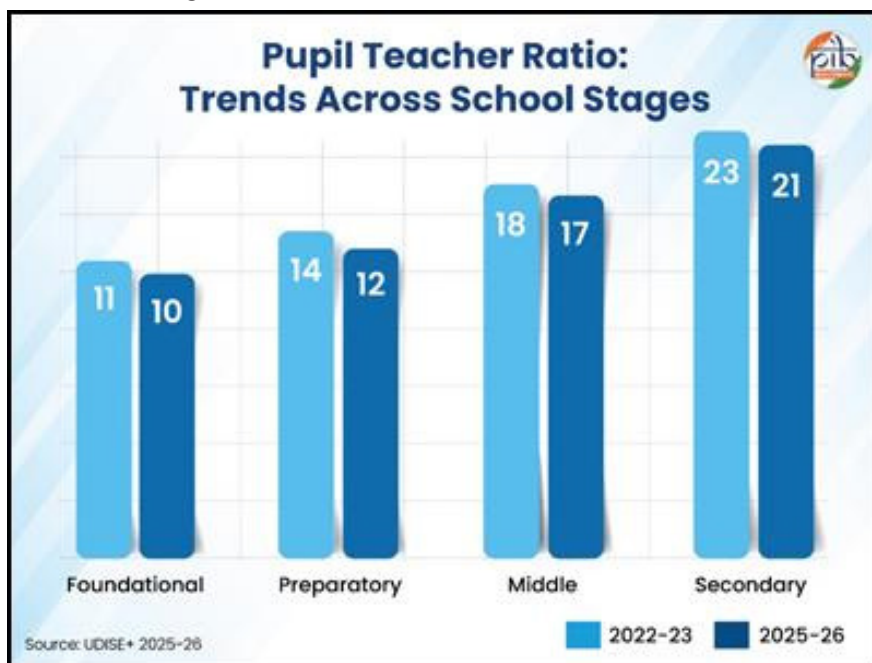
- ♦ **Aadhaar seeding** reaches 99.6% in Andhra Pradesh and 99% in Chandigarh, compared with only **35% in Meghalaya**, against a national average of 90.2%.
- ♦ Meghalaya records a **Foundational Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 131**, while Bihar records only 24. At the secondary stage, Chandigarh recorded 109, compared with Bihar's 48.



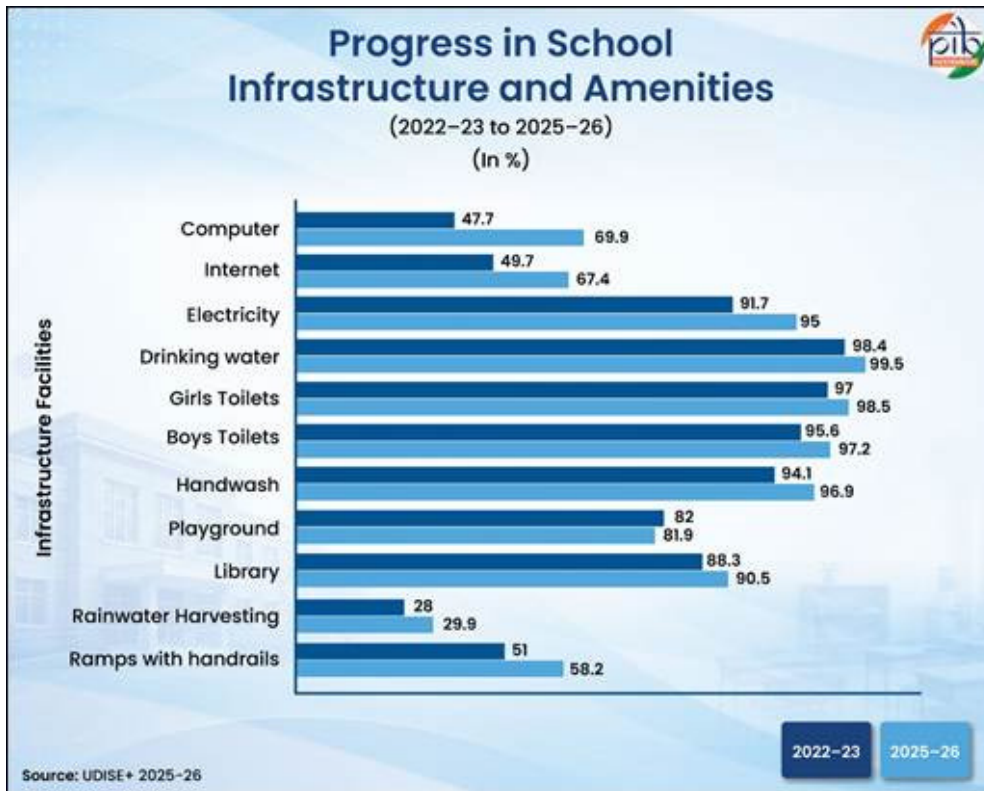
- **Social Disparities Persist:** Nationally, GER is highest among **OBC students (49%)**, followed by General (27%), SC (17%) and ST (10%).
- ♦ The composition of enrolment differs substantially across States and Union Territories: ST enrolment is particularly prominent in regions such as Mizoram, Meghalaya, Ladakh and Lakshadweep, while SC representation is high in Punjab.
- ♦ The **Gender Parity Index** indicates that girls' participation is higher than boys' across most States/UTs, marking an important achievement in gender inclusion.



- **Teacher Availability Remains Uneven:** The **Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)** varies considerably.
 - ♦ Secondary PTR reaches **43 in Jharkhand**, indicating significant pressure on teachers, whereas it is only 6 in Sikkim.
 - ♦ Rural and remote schools continue to experience teacher shortages and the burden of multi-grade teaching and non-teaching duties.



- **Dropout Remains a Concern:** Bihar records the highest **preparatory-stage dropout rate (7.9%)** and middle-stage dropout rate (9%).
 - ♦ At the secondary level, Ladakh records the highest rate at **14.8%**, followed by Karnataka.
 - ♦ Such patterns underline the difficulty of ensuring a smooth transition to and completion of secondary education.
- **Infrastructure and Inclusion Gaps:** Access to electricity and drinking water has improved, but infrastructure remains uneven.
 - ♦ Remote, tribal, hilly and border regions face greater difficulties in transport and school access.
 - ♦ Children from **SC/ST communities, minorities, poorer households and children with disabilities** continue to face additional barriers.



Key Issues and Concerns

- **Regional disparities:** enrolment, dropout rates, availability of schools, infrastructure, and teacher-student ratio vary widely from one state to another and from one union territory to another.
 - ♦ In hilly, tribal, border, and geographically distant locations, there are no schools and limited transitivity.
- **Social Inequalities:** SC, ST, minority and economically disadvantaged students face greater challenges
 - ♦ The GER reveals unequal access to education with large differences between social groups and levels of education.
 - ♦ Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Ladakh are among the states which have comparatively high dropout rates at different levels.
- **Shortage of teachers and workload:** There is still a shortage of trained teachers in rural, distant and poor places.
 - ♦ The teachers have a larger workload, specifically at the secondary level, and in populous States, the children get less individual attention.
- **Infrastructure deficits.** Drinking water and electricity are better, but many rural and poorly educated populations still lack basic utilities.
 - ♦ Many schools do not have accessible classrooms, inclusive infrastructure, and teaching approaches to support children with impairments.
- **Digital divide:** Differences in access to digital resources create barriers to learning opportunities between areas and communities.
- **Gender & inclusion problems:** Engagement of girls has improved, yet concerns are evident in terms of lowering dropouts and a smooth transition to secondary education.
- **Poor transition to higher grades:** Access to education has not always translated into better transition or retention from elementary to secondary education.

Related Reforms & Initiatives

- Government interventions include **NEP 2020, Samagra Shiksha, PM SHRI Schools, NIPUN Bharat, PM POSHAN, DIKSHA, UDISE+ and the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme.**
- These seek to strengthen foundational learning, infrastructure, nutrition, teacher capacity, digital access and educational inclusion.

Way Forward: Strengthening India's School Education System

- India needs to move from an **access-centric to an equity-and-learning-centric approach.**
- **Target educationally deprived districts** through need-based infrastructure and transport investment.
- **Rationalise teacher deployment** and incentivise teachers in rural, tribal and difficult areas.
- Strengthen **foundational literacy and numeracy** while improving secondary-school transition.
- Expand affordable **digital infrastructure and device access** without replacing classroom learning.
- Make schools genuinely **disability-inclusive**, with accessible buildings, assistive technologies and trained teachers.
- Use UDISE+ data for **district-level targeting, monitoring and outcome-based policy.**
- Integrate educational interventions with poverty reduction, nutrition, social protection and gender-sensitive policies.

Conclusion

- UDISE+ 2025–26 demonstrates that India has made considerable progress in expanding schooling, improving participation and strengthening infrastructure.
- But the persistence of regional and social inequalities shows that **universal access is not synonymous with equal educational opportunity.**
- Achieving the NEP 2020 vision and **SDG 4—quality education for all** requires targeted public investment, equitable teacher deployment and stronger support for disadvantaged communities.
- India's next educational transition must therefore be from **expansion to equity, quality and learning outcomes.**

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

- [Q] **India's school education system has made significant progress in expanding access and enrolment, but regional, social and infrastructural disparities continue to constrain equitable learning outcomes. Discuss.**

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