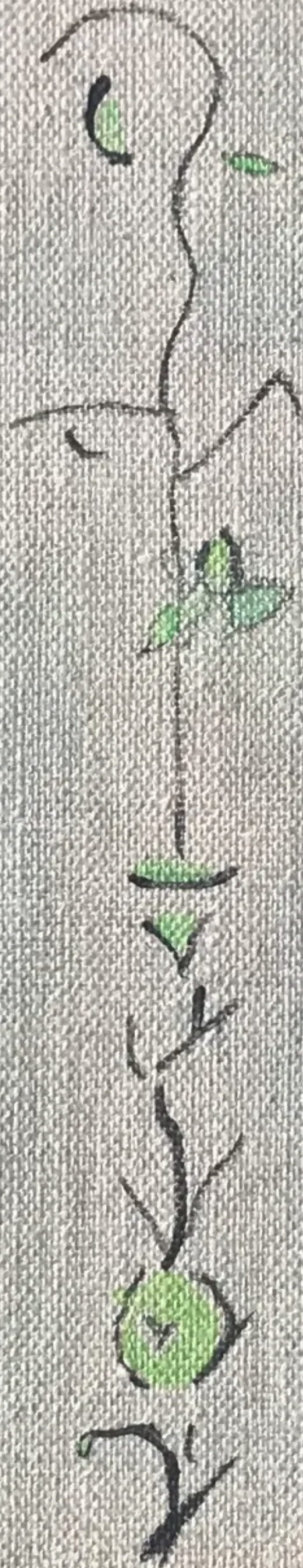


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Introduction

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Shalini Singh, 2026.

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NATIONAL POLICIES OF ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION: INDIA

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General historical background of ALE and LLL

The Indian civilisation is thousands of years old, and so are the provisions for the education and learning of adults. This section provides a brief overview of the ancient, medieval and modern periods.

The Ancient and Medieval Periods

The ancient system (3000 BCE -700 CE) was characterised by the *Hindu (Vedic)*, *Buddhist* and *Jain* systems. With four objectives - righteous living according to one's role in the society (*Dharma*), economic prosperity (*Artha*), enjoyment (*Kama*) and spiritual liberation (*Moksha*), institutions for higher learning (like *Nalanda* and *Takshashila*) for (*Pathshalas*), rich libraries, and possibilities for intellectual discussions, debates and exchange (*Parishads*), attracted adult scholars from all over the world, providing possibilities for multidisciplinary studies including medicine, astronomy, grammar, philosophy, warfare and so on (Atlekar, 1936; Mookerji, 1947).

Under the Hindu *Vedic* system, institutions, usually for the males of the higher social strata (priests and nobility), included residential schools (*Gurukuls*), where children (8-12-year-olds) entered and continued their education until they became young adults (24 or 25-year-olds); temple colleges (*Ghatikas*); and educational settlements (*Agraharas*). These spaces were characterised by strong gatekeeping through language specificity (*Sanskrit*), social

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barriers², gender bias, *oral* mode³, and traditions such as a peculiar *teacher-student relationship*⁴. The middle social layer (artisans and craftsmen) learnt skills such as carpentry, metalwork, pottery, and sculpting in vocational education centres or guilds (*Shrenis*) through apprenticeships under master artisans and craftsmen. The lower-middle and lower social layers (farmers, etc.) learned through family and community. The general masses relied on storytelling, usually in temples and public places, by the wise (usually men) who interpreted religious texts and explained what the correct way of life was. The lowest social layers (*untouchables* who performed cleaning, cremation, mended shoes or other leather work, etc.) were excluded from institutions and learnt informally within the family and community (Atlekar, 1936; Mookerji, 1947).

In principle, the advent of Buddhism and Jainism meant that institutions and places for higher learning (*Viharas/ Mahaviharas*) and intellectual exchange, discussions and debates (*Santhagars*) became open for everyone (irrespective of their social strata, economic condition, and gender) (Atlekar, 1936; Mookerji, 1947). Local languages (*Pali* and *Prakrit*) were adopted as the medium of instruction, communication, and exchange (Atlekar, 1936; Mookerji, 1947).

During the medieval period (700- 1757 CE), and especially with the arrival and settlement of Muslims in India, the existing provisions for adult learning and education under the Hindu Vedic, Buddhist and Jain systems were paralleled by Muslim Institutions of higher education (*Madrasas*). The focus of education shifted towards the production of goods, administration, and religion to support empires with rulers having different faiths, while trade, commerce, and knowledge exchange expanded through sea and land routes across continents. Imperial workshops were established, and the production of high-value goods for trade to generate wealth was patronised by the royals. The period also saw the rise of socio-religious Hindu (*Bhakti*) and Muslim (*Sufi*) movements to create awareness among the masses regarding life skills, apart from spiritualism. Religious (*temples, mosques, dargahs, etc.*) and non-religious

² Especially, social stratification through the caste system marred the Indian education landscape. Only the higher strata had access to education and the lower strata even suffered punishment for engagement in learning, thereby preserving the social norm that education (systematic intervention by the teacher to impart certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to the student) was not meant for everyone.

³ The teachers (*Gurus*) decided what they should teach and to which pupils. The method was primarily oral and implied that much knowledge was at risk of being lost during the process or was highly subjective due to human factors like forgetfulness and variation in interpretation.

⁴ In the mentioned teacher-student relationship (*Guru-shishya Parampara*), the teacher was placed on a pedestal and had more influence over the student as compared to parents during the study period. The students resided with the teachers in the residential schools called *Ashrams* and learnt to play a role in society for the rest of their lives, in accordance with their social status. The roots are still prevalent in society and sometimes prove dangerous.

(*Choupals*) spaces became centres for this informal learning for the masses, irrespective of their socio-economic background and gender (Ghosh, 2001)

The Modern Period⁵

During the early modern period and colonisation by the British and other European states (1757-1947), several social reformers initiated mass movements (informal campaigns) for education in different ways. However, the most remarkable changes were brought by the British, who introduced the Western system of education, and the flourishing indigenous system based on learning declined⁶. The objectives included changes not only in knowledge and skills, but also in perspectives, mindsets, tastes, opinions and even morals. These shaped the preferences and decision-making of educated Indians for decades thereafter. Universities were set up, and several elite-class adults, usually males, had access to them. They even had the opportunity to travel abroad and learn. Among these Western-educated elite class people, several, like *Mahatma Gandhi*⁷ and *Jawaharlal Nehru*⁸, were influenced by the ideas of equality and freedom and initiated and/or facilitated mass literacy movements in the country. Several Western missionaries and administrative reformists who wanted to initiate social reforms also joined them (Rao, 2024).

Literacy campaigns (including evening classes or *night schools* for literacy), cooperative and agrarian extension movements for economic self-sufficiency, and education for political mobilisation against colonial rule became common. In 1937, education for economic self-sufficiency and life skills (*Basic Education* or *Nai Talim*) was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi for *the masses* to mobilise them against colonisation. It was based on non-formal and informal learning.

In 1947, when India became independent, it chose to continue following the British model of education with elements of Gandhian ideas. Apart from other reasons, most leaders were educated in the West and were preparing to carve a niche for the country in the international arena, where the Western way of thinking predominated. India was one of the

⁵ The period after the independence of India in 1947 is marked by various political-legal documents such as policies, strategies, regulations, committee reports and so on, described briefly in this section, and included in the Annexure attached at the end of this report.

⁶ In 1835, the *English Education Act* was passed on the recommendations of Lord Macaulay, who argued that the indigenous system was filled with unscientific, superstitious elements and should therefore be replaced by the Western system of education.

⁷ Father of the Indian nation and the most remarkable freedom fighter, who had much influence on contemporary leaders and the masses when policy choices were being formulated. His ideas were included in several committee reports and policies after independence.

⁸ Independent India's first Prime Minister and a well-known global leader who led the Non-Aligned Movement during the early period of the Cold War.

first few colonised countries to achieve independence, which implied that the political risk of changing the whole system was difficult to calculate and even perceive. In fact, rehauling the entire education system would require enormous resources and efforts on the ground, which appeared unrealistic at that time. After independence, India was left with very few resources to deal with gigantic challenges such as communal riots (that exceeded the death toll and brutality in Nazi Germany), starvation, and so on, while any serious flaws in the Western education system were not evident.

India is a *quasi-federal*⁹ *Union of States* (regional units). After independence, each territorial unit, called *State*, was given the authority to develop its own education policy. Apart from other factors, the Indian education policy for several decades thereafter was based on the need to achieve faster and intensive economic growth through heavy industrialisation; strengthening democracy (and avoiding communism)¹⁰ by creating social awareness; and a lack of adequate resources to provide equal educational opportunities for everyone (Singh, 2024). India adopted a model of a planned economy where development was the key goal, and education was *one of the means* to achieve the same. Therefore, resources for education were allocated according to the *5-year plans* up until the 12th Plan (2012-2017)¹¹.

Post-independence India, preparing for rapid industrialisation and economic growth, needed to develop provisions to support the same. Since resources were limited and the society was highly fragmented on socio-economic and religious grounds, access to quality provisions became a *privilege* for a *few*, who should then lead the masses towards overall development. The period between 1947 and 1966 can be categorised as the foundational period. During this period, the basic regulatory framework; key regulatory, implementing and pioneering institutions; and the basic infrastructure for the education of adults, including general higher, technical, professional, vocational education, and workplace learning (largely non-formal and compliance-based), were developed (See Annexure). India had a literacy rate of 18 per cent in 1947, which meant that a large part of the population was unable to access formal education but still needed to be engaged with the society constructively. Therefore, a mass (non-formal) movement on social education (1949-54) for the *disadvantaged many* was started for literacy, inculcating democratic values and

⁹ India is considered a quasi-federation because unlike an ideal federation, the Union, also called the *Centre*, is more powerful than the territorial units in India.

¹⁰ This was during the Cold War period when communism was spreading fast.

¹¹ The 5-year plans model was discontinued after the 2012-2017 plan, as India underwent a major political change in 2014 with the acquisition of power by Narendra Modi, belonging to the far right and continuing till date (2026).

citizenship among the masses (and hence curtailing the spread of communism), and engaging them in the broader process of development.

Between 1962 and 1966, India faced two major wars (with China and Pakistan), political upheaval due to the death of two serving Prime Ministers within two years, two severe droughts and famines, and a resulting severe foreign exchange crisis. India's next two 5-year plans (the fourth (1968-74), focusing on education for social justice, and the fifth (1974-79), focusing on poverty alleviation) argued for building up economic self-sufficiency for the country. While the next three years (1966-69) went by with annual survival plans only due to the political and economic situation, the first National Education Policy was already taking shape.

In 1968, India got its first National Education Policy, followed by a period of expansion of provisions and access. The focus of policy provisions for adults was on creating and expanding institutions and opportunities for relevant research in agriculture, industry, and the concomitant infrastructure, often developed with the support of foreign investments. Therefore, *engineers, scientists and researchers* with quality formal higher education were needed to lead the processes, a second tier of *technicians and supporting staff* with vocational education (diploma after school) were needed to support the lead, and the third tier of *manpower* (agriculture, industry, and infrastructure project workers) with non-formal education (usually for non-literates and semi-literates) were required to engage in strenuous work. Gradually, higher education and research institutions were linked with the community through extension programs. Departments of adult education were set up to facilitate the process, train adult educators and multipliers, and conduct research to optimise the outcomes of *extension* initiatives. Women were brought into the adult education programs to increase labour force participation and disseminate the outcomes of development among them. As a result, India managed to fuel the *Green* (agricultural) and *White* (dairy) *Revolutions* and reduce its dependency on food imports.

In 1975, India underwent a major political upheaval following several national and international challenges. As one of the consequences, the policy area of education was brought on the common list (*Concurrent List*) among the *States* and the *Centre (Union)* in 1976 so that national laws could be made regarding education. Following this change, national regulations and institutions developed, and intensive nationwide campaigns for literacy began. The 5-year plans during the period focused on poverty alleviation till 1984, after which the leadership changed, and a young, technology-oriented leadership¹² came

¹² Under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

into power (See document mapping in Annexure). The provisions prioritised human resource development, balanced growth, social justice, empowerment, and inclusion.

Consequently, access to formal education for the *disadvantaged many* and the working population expanded with a focus on quality, standardisation, and technological advancements. In adult education (predominantly non-formal), a nationwide administrative and implementation structure was developed, which worked effectively to deliver adult education programs. The fundamental change was reflected in the formation of a new Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985, which included education, culture, youth, women and child development. This was followed by the establishment of India's largest open distance education university (*Indira Gandhi National Open University*) in 1985, which aimed at providing not only access for those who could not study in regular programs but also continuing and further education programs for everyone. Meanwhile, the next National Education Policy of India, released in 1986, had *lifelong education* as one of the goals. The *Rural Functional Literacy Project* and the *Mass Programme of Functional Literacy* were launched in the same year, and literacy became a national mission owing to several crucial initiatives, such as the *National Literacy Mission, 1988*; *Total Literacy Campaign 1989-90*; and various post-literacy & continuing education programmes in the 1990. Apart from changes to enhance quality, standardisation, and create nationwide balanced and inclusive opportunities in formal higher and professional education, adult education was linked to vocational education. Pathways were provided for those who finalised adult education programs and wanted to access vocational education, primarily through non-formal programs. Women's polytechnics were established to enhance female participation and create gender balance.

In 1991, India faced a major economic crisis and was forced to liberalise its economy¹³. Following this, education policy was aligned with the World Bank policy of channelling resources towards universal primary education and gender parity. This was further facilitated by the acceptance of the market model, rising demand for quality education and judicial legitimisation through various landmark judgements. These promoted the privatisation of provisions for adults and reliance on civil society (voluntarism) in adult education.

The Revised National Education Policy in 1992, therefore, aligned with the logic of returns on investment in formal education and reliance on voluntarism-based civil society in adult

¹³ India was *rescued* by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's economic assistance. In return, India had to follow the World Bank's guidelines strictly.

education. The gradual decline of adult education programs due to difficulties in measuring the outcomes and a lack of *implementation fidelity* in countries where local stakeholders (including the state) took ownership of foreign-aided programs was evident in India as well (Singh, 2024). Consequently, adult education in India began to decline as a priority in public policy (Singh, 2024).

As the Indian economy gradually strengthened, India once again prioritised economic growth and social justice in its 5-year plans and prepared to enter the growing competition among knowledge economies.

However, despite being a young nation (with an average age of 22.2 years in 2005), a large part of the population was still non-literate or semi-literate, unskilled or semi-skilled, employed in low-income, low-productivity jobs. The universal primary education and gender parity program increased access significantly, but did not lead to quality learning outcomes. Therefore, the young population now stood at a crossroads. Quality, cost-effective, and short-cycled labour market-oriented programs could let India reap a high demographic dividend, while continuing its policy with an exploding number of private provisions for those who can afford it could lead to a demographic disaster.

Using the 2008 global economic crisis as a *window of opportunity*, India introduced a major policy change. A merger of general and technical higher education and professional education was proposed in 2009. Vocational programs were extended to higher education, while workplace learning and adult education programs were extended, in some instances merged with, and in some instances, linked to vocational education. Recognition of Prior Learning was included in the skills policy, and formal, non-formal educational provisions for adults began to merge gradually, at least in policy. The focus was now on vocational education and skills to promote employability. As a result, the *National Skill Development Corporation* was established in 2008, followed by the National Policy on Skills Development in 2009. This initiative targeted the traditional adult education target population - the non-literates and school drop-outs searching for subsistence livelihood skills; those low-skilled, low-paid adults working in the informal sector; those who needed recognition of prior learning; those who needed bridge courses for formal certification; and so on. The idea was to provide opportunities for the low-income, marginalised groups who needed skills for subsistence livelihood and could not afford private options. The model was based on a *Public-Private Partnership (PPP)*.

In 2013, the National Skills Qualifications Framework was introduced to align academic, vocational and technical education across 10 levels. This was followed by the establishment

of the *Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship* in 2014, which brought all skill development initiatives under various Ministries and in several policy areas, under one umbrella Ministry. However, adult education remained under the *Ministry of Human Resources*.

Thus, a significant share of the target group for adult education, now moved to skill development, where the private sector was engaged to make the offers relevant to the labour market and of better quality, while the government was subsidising the learners. In other words, the skill aspect of adult education was now co-funded by the private sector, along with the state. Internationalisation was promoted, and the Skills policy became the core of India's ambitious quest towards a knowledge economy (Singh, 2015; Prasad, 2026).

In 2014, India underwent an overall policy transformation. The far right came to power with a strong *Hindu nationalist* agenda. Since then, the 5-year plan model has been discontinued, and attempts to restructure the education system are evident not only in policy but also in the context shaping it. Gradually, *crony capitalism*¹⁴ has been gaining more dominance over the Indian political and economic landscape, with *excessive control from the Centre*, especially the *Prime Minister's Office*, and strong repercussions for education. Since the expression of dissent and open criticism threatens the ruling elite as well as crony capitalism, educational activities do not encourage critical thinking, open speech and expression, transparency in information sharing, or even international exchange that might bring in ideas or practices unsupportive of the government. This is evident from various decisions mentioned later in the report and the Annexure and is key to understanding the shifts in the Indian education policy for adults post-2014.

Since 2014, India's quest to become a knowledge economy and promote inclusion has been replaced by a vision of developing the country into a manufacturing hub¹⁵ and becoming a global knowledge leader rooted in ancient knowledge systems¹⁶ (Government of India, 2020a; Viksit India, n.d.). This benefits not only the government¹⁷ but also *Big Business*. As discussed later in the report, evident from the mapping in Annexure, and highlighted in research, decisions in education policy are dominated by profit considerations of *Big Business* and political considerations (including the *Hindu Nationalist* agenda) of the ruling

¹⁴ A state (political economy) run by the close nexus between Big Business and the government.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, India's manufacturing aspirations rely heavily on cheap labour (International Labour Organisation, 2024).

¹⁶ Apart from the references in the National Education Policy 2020, the narrative is often reflected in patterns for research funding, curricula, themes of conferences, academic debates and discussions, and so on.

¹⁷ When most people are hand-to-mouth and worry about daily challenges, it is difficult for them to think critically or raise questions.

elite, rather than academic expertise (Singh, 2024; Yan, 2024; Altbach & Mathews, 2025; Kaur & Sharma, 2025; Thakur & Vaishali, 2025). Education has become a means to expand the political base and defuse criticism against the Central government, produce cheap labour for Big Business, and generate huge profit by selling formal degrees and diplomas regardless of the high academic inflation, poor quality of offers, and lack of employment opportunities (Singh, 2024; Altbach & Mathews, 2025; Kaur & Sharma, 2025; Thakur & Vaishali, 2025; Sarangapani, 2025) .

More concretely, while the pre-2014 proposal to integrate education gradually remains under consideration, the objectives have changed from a shift towards a knowledge economy fuelled by *lifelong learning* to centralisation and control under the Centre. The tendency towards centralisation is ambiguous, but evident from the lack of clarification and proposed policy (British Council, 2025; Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025; Abraham et al., 2026). Even though foreign investment is embraced in education (Niti Aayog, 2025a), potentially subversive foreign ideas and values are kept in check¹⁸.

Funding for research and innovation reflects a similar pattern, and extension programs under higher education institutions align with the government's agenda. Several funding calls under the research funding initiatives such as the *Indian Knowledge Systems Division*, *SUTRA-PIC Initiative*, and *Science and Research Heritage Initiative*, and decisions like access from *Gurukuls* to Top Academic Institutions (like IITs) without formal education¹⁹ have been vehemently criticised, owing to their references to ancient knowledge systems instead of modern science and focus on religiously relevant symbolism such as cows. As mentioned in the Annexure and the report, new stakeholders, stakes, and actors in quality control and accreditation structures have already replaced, or are replacing, the pre-2014 ones. Limited public elite-class opportunities for higher and professional education are available at subsidised costs. However, fair access to them is jeopardised because of discrepancies and corruption in examinations, selection, and evaluation (Ranka & Paudel, 2026). Consequently, due to severe competition, a massive *shadow education* (private coaching and tutoring) industry has grown (Kaur & Sharma, 2025). Quality education is therefore either too expensive or too difficult to access, and at times both, which keeps a large part of the adult population from pursuing higher or professional education.

¹⁸ For instance, see the changed VISA Regulations and invitation procedure for foreign researchers and academicians. Prior event clearance, clearance of each guest's name from the Ministry of Home Affairs, political clearance from the Ministry of External Affairs, and clearance from the Nodal Ministry are made mandatory (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022).

¹⁹ For instance, see the call from the Department of Science and Technology, 2020; Ministry of Education & Central Sanskrit University, 2025.

Provisions for low-paid apprenticeship training opportunities for up to 3 years are provided in collaboration with industry for fresh formal (higher, professional, technical, and vocational) degree and diploma holders²⁰, and for the low- or semi-skilled, with basic formal education and non-formal or informal learning thereafter²¹. However, official government audit reports highlight major discrepancies, corruption, data manipulation, and poor-quality provisions (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2025). This, in fact, appears to be a provision for cheap labour disguised as apprenticeships for profitable enterprises²².

Poorly educated, *disadvantaged many* in India are bound to accept precarious jobs or subsistence self-employment (International Labour Organisation, 2024). With the introduction of AI, the jobs of these low-paid workers are in danger, but resilient upskilling and reskilling opportunities remain largely on paper (International Labour Organisation, 2024; Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2025). For instance, despite mentioning vocational skills as a component of provisions for non-, neo-, or post-literates (the most vulnerable and marginalised), no clear provisions, guidelines, or funding exist in the public domain²³ (See the section on funding in this report). Similarly, even though gig workers have been brought under the purview of laws in favour of workplace learning with an *if-needed* clause, reports indicate that they are neither trained adequately nor do they have realistic pathways for further learning that could secure dignified employment for them (International Labour Organisation, 2024).

The situation of workplace learning is grave in the private sector in general, and the informal sector (comprising about 90% of the economy) within it. This is due to governments' gradual concessions to Big Business regarding compliance, which indirectly reduce the scope and opportunities for learning (see labour codes mentioned in the Annexure). In fact, the idea of highly skilled labour, engaged in frequent upskilling and reskilling, with recognition of prior learning, makes labour costly and, therefore, does not align with the *cheap labour agenda*. Data suggest an excess of cheap labour but limited livelihood opportunities (Data for India, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2025b). In fact, under *Government-to-Government Agreements*, India is exporting cheap labourers to conflict zones in Israel and Russia for menial jobs

²⁰ The National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) is overseen by the Ministry of Education. The target group includes formal degree and diploma holders.

²¹ The National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) is overseen by the Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship. The target group includes 14-to 35-year-olds with at least primary education.

²² A large share of Indian industry imports already manufactured parts and assembles them in India. This requires low-skilled workers, and apprentices are often engaged with limited need for compliance that would otherwise be required for employing wagers or regular employees.

²³ A *Right to Information application* was filed by the author, requesting information from the responsible government department, i.e., the Cell for the National Centre for Literacy (CNCL), to confirm this vide RTI Number NSERT/R/E/26/00336/1 dated 13.06.2026.

(Ministry of External Affairs, 2025a; 2026b; 2026), putting their well-being and lives in danger (Balachandran, 2024; Ganapathy & Singam, 2026)²⁴.

India has the largest number of non-literates in the world, despite a rudimentary standard for measuring literacy compared to international standards (for instance, see PIAAC standards (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.)). Still, in 2022, Adult education was renamed *Education For All*²⁵ to include children, and thus marked the end of a separate adult education sector in India. While more than half of the non-literates are 50 years or older, this change paints a picture of a fast leap towards literacy without doing much for older adults (Singh, 2024). Notably, World Bank data shows that younger cohorts suffer from *learning poverty* due to poor-quality basic education, and the problem is not generation-specific (World Bank, 2024). In other words, the World Bank projects that despite being literate, future adults in India might lack the required functional literacy and basic skills (World Bank, 2024).

Both the nomenclature and the text of the National Education Policy, 2020 (currently the relevant major national policy document) and follow-up strategies indicate that *lifelong learning* is perceived merely as a *component* or an extension of adult education. For instance, while the section on adult education in the National Education Policy is called *adult education and life long* (as spelt in the document) *learning*, the flagship program for non-, neo-, or post-literates stands for *Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society (ULLAS)*. Therefore, the Indian understanding of lifelong learning, as reflected in its current policy, is not aligned with the common, internationally standardised understanding of lifelong learning, as defined by institutions such as the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (See UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2014).

Therefore, while the adult education sector has been officially non-existent in India since 2022, lifelong learning is interpreted differently. Skill development, vocational training, further education, extension, recognition of prior learning and several other aspects that comprise adult learning are therefore present in India under different strands and policy provisions. For instance, higher education includes research and training for adult educators, execution of extension programs, voluntarism for literacy connected to credits, and further education. To make this report internationally comparable, include relevant provisions, and make the reader understand why adult education and lifelong learning in India are the way they are, a comprehensive overview of all provisions for the education

²⁴ Several news stories reveal that workers going to Israel and Russia are high in numbers and are forced to live and work in inhumane conditions, abused or even forced to fight in the wars.

²⁵ Not to be confused with the international *Education For All movement*, 1990s onwards.

and learning of adults (which influence adult education and lifelong learning) is included in the section below and in the Annexure of the report.

Current relevant national legislation pertaining to adult and lifelong learning (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL)

As the general historical background shows, there are five relevant strands regarding the education of adults in India.

1. The first strand constitutes formal higher education and includes general, technical, vocational, and further education in these streams. While most provisions fall under the Ministry of Education, some autonomous institutions fall directly under the Central Government²⁶. The strand is governed by the National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020a). Regulatory authorities under the Ministry of Education include the University Grants Commission (for general and vocational education in universities) and the All India Council for Technical Education (for technical and vocational education in technical higher education institutions). Apart from that, *autonomous institutions* (such as the National Institutes of Technology) are governed by explicit parliamentary acts. Most institutions play three roles - teaching, research and *extension*. Extension includes reaching out to the community and sharing expertise, generally in *non-formal* ways. This includes creating awareness, promoting functional literacy, facilitating the implementation of state initiatives by preparing the community for adaptation or change, and so on. Furthermore, departments of adult education (renamed gradually as *continuing education*, *community outreach*, *extension* and/or *lifelong learning*) for professional training of adult educators or research in the field are included in general higher education and are governed by the University Grants Commission. This also includes teaching, even though teaching is categorised as professional education.
2. The second strand comprises professional education, such as the education for doctors and lawyers. It is regulated by several specialised councils (such as the National Medical Commission of India for medicine). Sometimes, these professional bodies share governance with the Ministry of Education as well (for

²⁶ These institutions are free from traditional bureaucratic procedures and are closely linked with the industry due to the nature of their offers, for instance, IT courses.

instance, in law), but *specialised councils* are the key regulators. These councils come under respective ministries. For instance, the National Medical Commission comes under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, whereas the Bar Council of India comes under the Ministry of Law. Only teaching, regulated by the National Council of Teacher Education, falls under the Ministry of Education, governed by the Department of School Education and Literacy. Even though professional training does not necessarily include outreach initiatives, several professions and institutions, such as some government medical colleges and teacher education, require community service and outreach activities (which could be categorised as adult education) as part of professional training. For teachers, adult education is mandatory and included in their curriculum (National Council for Teacher Education, 2024).

3. The third strand, meant to prepare a major part of the workforce for the labour market, comprises skills training (mostly non-formal) and vocational education (mostly formal, below higher education). The target group includes those with or without formal education and/or needing recognition of prior learning. This comes under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and is currently regulated by the Prime Minister's Skill Development Plan 4.0 (Government of India, 2023; Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, n.d.). In many countries, this strand is included in adult education. In India, it has been moving in and out of adult education (see Annexure). At present, the minimum requirements to access opportunities under this strand include basic literacy and, sometimes, primary education. *Bridge courses* are connected to recognition of prior learning and relevant opportunities.
4. The fourth strand comprises second-chance, continuing, and extension education. It used to be adult education (for 15-year-olds or older) until 2022 and is primarily aimed at *inclusion*. However, after it was renamed *Education for All* in 2022, children were included, and a separate adult education sector officially ceased to exist. The focus is on literacy, and the component catering to adults (15-year-olds and above) is called the *NIL (New India Literacy) Program*. The target group includes school dropouts or post-literates who are unable to access skills training and vocational education programs due to a lack of competency. The first (current) 5 years (2022-27) are covered by the ULLAS program, which has 5 components - *foundational literacy and numeracy* (reading, writing and arithmetic), *critical life skills* (such as functional, digital and electoral literacy), *basic education* (equivalent to formal education at school through non-formal pathways), *vocational skills* (skills for subsistence livelihood

like tailoring), and *continuing education* (courses on arts, culture, sports, and so on, primarily for leisure and recreation). The digital component of the ULLAS program is called *OTLAS* (Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System), operated through a digital application. *Non-literates* may register, enrol, download study material, study online, get assessed online and even receive certification online.

It is important to note that the vocational skills component under the fourth strand is meant for those who lack the minimum qualifications or basic competencies to access the third strand, i.e. skills training and vocational education. Specific, concrete guidelines about provisions, resources and relevant outcomes for components other than literacy are missing from the public domain despite several activities and events (using public money) reported on the official website (See Ministry of Education, 2022; ULLAS, n.d.; Cell for National Centre for Literacy, n.d.; National Council of Educational Research and Training, n.d.). The strand comes under the Ministry of Education. It is governed by the National Education Policy 2020 and several other implementation documents issued thereafter by the Ministry of Education and two assisting agencies - the Cell for the National Centre for Literacy (CNCL), for implementing the provisions; and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), for assessing and providing equivalency with the formal education system.

Since there is no funding for imparting literacy skills on the ground under the ULLAS program, its implementation relies heavily on *mandatory voluntarism* by students of higher education and some professional education programs (see section on funding).

5. The fifth strand includes *workplace learning* in formal (10-13 %) and informal (87-90 %) sectors, not governed by specific learning or educational provisions, but rather by labour laws under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. The Industrial Relations Code 2020, The Code on Social Security 2020, the Apprentices Act 1961 (with several amendments) and various Labour Codes govern training, such as technical upskilling or compliance (for instance, about Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace, or training for working in dangerous conditions like mines) in the formal and the informal sectors (Government of India, 2020b; 2020c; Directorate General of Training, n.d.). Provisions under this strand fall under *legal compliance* rather than educational offers. However, if learning opportunities are outsourced in educational institutions (especially in technical and vocational institutions), including the recognition of prior learning and/or bridge programs, they can be jointly regulated by the Ministry of Labour

and Employment and the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, whichever is relevant.

The National Policy on Education 2020 governs the current education system, while the vision for the education system is aligned with the idea of *Developed India (Viksit Bharat) by 2047* (Viksit India, n.d.). The idea envisions India becoming a *Knowledge Superpower* with an education and training system rooted in strong nationalistic values and glorification of the past (*ancient Hindu Vedic system*, see Introduction) (Viksit India, n.d.). The Indian education system, according to this vision, should transform individuals into responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the nation and can lead the world with their knowledge and contribution to global well-being (Viksit India, n.d.).

The priorities for action include enhancing employability through imparting skills training relevant to the labour market, providing academic-skills parity by encouraging vocational education and training, social entrepreneurship for optimum job creation to address several years of jobless economic growth, inclusion through functional literacy, and safety and job security through workplace learning, especially in the informal sector.

Specific mid and long-term targets include increasing the overall ratio of learners with higher education from 28.4 % at present to 60% by 2047; ensuring that 75% of the higher education students get industry-ready skill training by 2028-29; increasing the number of filed patents to 50,000 annually with 15,000 startups in Higher Education campuses by 2029; ensuring that at least 10 Indian Institutions rank among the top 200 globally by 2029; providing autonomy to at least 500 Indian Higher Education institutions for awarding degrees; building up the *education market* to position India among the top 8 education destinations globally by 2030, targeting an intake of 500,000 international students every year by 2047; providing vocational training to at least 50% of the learners in formal education by 2030; ensuring that 35% of the students in the formal system achieve apprenticeship-embedded degrees or credit-based internships by 2029; ensuring that every graduate learns at least 1 vocational skill by 2047; and achieving 100% functional literacy by 2047 (FICCI-EY, 2024; NITI Aayog, 2025a).

Extent of devolution of powers in ALE and LLL to regions and cities, and to social partners

As mentioned in the introduction, India has a quasi-federal structure of governance. Legislative powers are divided between the Centre or the Union (quasi-Federal authority)

and the States (the territorial units) through a *List System*. There are three Lists: the *Union List*, the *State List* and the *Concurrent List*. The Union List comprises legislative areas under the Centre, the State List includes legislative areas under the States, and the Concurrent List consists of legislative areas under both. However, when there is a conflict or duplication, the Centre's laws shall prevail. Apart from this, there are *Residuary Powers* (subjects not on any lists) that rest under the Parliament's direct authority, dominated by the Centre. While education is on the concurrent list, most new policy areas, such as Artificial Intelligence and digitalisation (including Ed Tech), are often categorised under Residuary Powers, giving the already stronger Centre more influence than States. The Centre usually formulates the overarching education policies, while the States, implementing agencies, regulatory bodies, and other autonomous entities develop implementation strategies.

Since 2014, centralisation in policy formulation has increased, owing to reasons such as weakening institutions and democratic processes; increasing intervention and control of the Prime Minister's Office over bureaucracy; and direct monitoring in all policy areas (public, private and mixed) by the Prime Minister's Office through various e-portals and other means (like use of intelligence agencies) (Institut Montaigne, 2024; Sharma & Swenden, 2025; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026). Unlike in the past, the engagement of experts and stakeholders has become nominal. For instance, the National Education Policy 2020, approved by the Prime Minister's Office in 2020, is significantly different from its 2019 draft, prepared by the Ministry of Education with inputs from two expert committees and public consultations among various stakeholders. There is little clarity in the public domain regarding where the changes came from. Various structural bodies, for instance, the Planning Commission of India, that had decision-making powers over resource allocation for education in the past have now been replaced by weaker institutions, such as the *NITI Aayog* (acronymised form of *the National Institution for Transforming India*), which *may advise the Prime Minister's Office when asked to do so* but lack similar decision-making powers.

While the Centre sets the agenda, the States must allocate a considerable (about 75-80%, usually comprising running costs) component of the total required resources and implement the policy (Ministry of Finance, n.d.). The revenue of the States is often inadequate for meeting all expenses. Consequently, they become dependent on the Centre for resources. When the Centre formulates costly policies, and States should share the costs, State resources are often exhausted, and additional alternative or parallel initiatives by the States become difficult to execute. In recent years, the Centre has been making it increasingly difficult for the States to spend or hold back specifically allocated funds, facilitated by meticulous control (Department of Expenditure, 2024). Further, taxation laws and provisions

for resource allocation have changed, starving the States of revenue and resources. Therefore, despite having the freedom to launch initiatives, the States remain bound to the Centre through resources, and the policy structure remains rather centralised (Department of Expenditure, 2024). Furthermore, the Centre tends to exercise control over State initiatives through the office of the Governor (political head appointed by the Centre in States), whose assent is required in several contexts to implement the decisions of the State governments. Therefore, while the Centre may gain *popularity* through several costly schemes and policy announcements, the States often bear major costs and criticism for implementation failures. Cases of stand-offs between the Centre and the States (with elected heads belonging to political parties other than the one in the Centre) have been increasing in recent years, for instance, in relation to the appointment of heads of higher education institutions, amendments in university laws (State of West Bengal v. Dr. C. V. Ananda Bose, 2025; State of Kerala v. Governor for State of Kerala, 2025; State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu, 2025) and funding allocations under various schemes (Ministry of Finance, n.d.).

A major influence on Indian policies is cast by the market players, especially a few business houses whose market shares and net worths have skyrocketed since 2014. Many of them own private educational institutions that receive subsidies, special favours, and even endorsements from the government (Pathak, 2018; Sahoo, 2023). In fact, several political leaders in India *own* educational and training institutions and the influence of crony capitalism in the education for adults cannot be denied, especially in relation to the increasing costs of education. Not only is the quality of public provision in terms of equitable access (for instance, through entrance examinations), functioning (for instance, political interference with curricula), and outcomes in these institutions (for instance, extremely low graduate employability) declining, but the state's accountability and efforts to address the gaps are lacking as well (for instance, see Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2025²⁷). This leaves space for private providers, including Indian and foreign market players, as well as a huge *shadow education (private tutoring)* industry.

Social partners have limited influence on the Indian education policy formulation in general, but might have some influence in specific contexts, for instance, in the State of Kerala, ruled by communist governments for a long time (several periods between 1957 and 2026). Usually, the social partners assist the government in policy implementation. Civil society

²⁷ The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India revealed huge discrepancies (for instance, data discrepancies in information about 94% of the participants) in provisions for skills and vocational training under the Ministry of Skills Education and Entrepreneurship.

organisations, when involved in any sort of cooperation or even voluntary action, must adhere to the guidelines provided by the government, lest they risk punitive action (Aiyar, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c). The representatives of social partners or civil society organisations might become a part of committees and boards when specifically asked by the government. However, the impact and/ or influence of their intervention is usually nominal or at least publicly undisclosed.

Influence and/or policy linkages to supranational organisations

International policies have largely influenced the education of adults in India in the past in terms of policy provisions and their context.

Until 1990, India closely reflected the UNESCO policy for both adult literacy and technical vocational education and training. This included social education for citizenship and community development between 1948 and 1964; farmers' functional literacy program for preparing farmers to use technologically advanced equipment, fertilisers, and modern means in agriculture between 1965 and 1977; and the National Adult Education Program aimed at literacy from 1978 till the 1990s. However, during the mid-1990s, when UNESCO started promoting lifelong learning on one hand through the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning and following the World Bank policy on primary education and gender parity on the other, India focused on the latter. Since then, UNESCO has remained a knowledge partner for literacy and technical and vocational education initiatives. This includes providing support for the development of teaching-learning materials, evaluations and policy inputs, providing reporting frameworks, and so on (Singh, 2023; 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

Since the 1970s, the World Bank has promoted industrialisation through investments in infrastructure and manpower training, both formally (in areas with infrastructure) and non-formally (in areas without educational infrastructure) (Singh et al., 2023; Singh, 2023; 2024). From the mid-1980s, the World Bank emphasised that the limited public funding available for education in low and middle-income countries should be channelled towards basic formal education with a focus on gender parity, while the education of adults should be left to private financing. After a major economic crisis in 1991, India aligned with this policy in the name of *austerity measures* to ensure that the World Bank and the IMF supported its economic recovery.

During the Cold War, India was among the prominent leaders of the *Non-Aligned Movement*²⁸, and after its economic recovery, it has been striving to achieve a leading position once again. The vision of becoming a *Knowledge Leader* reflects this tendency. India has been a party to the international goals, including the Jomtien Declaration on Education For All 1990, the Dakar Framework of Action 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015, and is obliged to report with data in alignment with the global education monitoring architecture (Singh et al., 2023; Singh, 2023; 2024). Due to this, India aligns its policies or at least its reporting and documentation, with the international parameters and guidelines (Singh, 2024).

The World Bank is the largest external investor (with strategic loans for 14-18 years) in the education sector, investing several billion dollars each year in Higher, Technical, and Vocational Education, along with Foundational Literacy. Its major investment projects include the STARS (Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States) Project, aiming at training the teachers and non-teaching staff at schools for quality teaching and management in six States and involving \$500 Million; establishment of assessment cells for Foundational Literacy; enhancing the quality of technical education in terms of preparing STEM students for the labour market and ensuring gender parity, involving \$255.5 Million; and promoting well-being among adolescents. Further, the World Bank has partnered with the Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship for decentralised planning (at the district level), skills training with a high placement rate (65%); increasing apprenticeship engagement in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and involving \$125 Million; promoting school-to-work transitions by imparting employability-oriented bridge programs; and investing in e-platforms for digital access and transparency (DIKSHA and PM-e-VIDYA portal) (World Bank, 2020; Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2021; Rajasekaran et. al, 2024; World Bank, 2025a; World Bank, 2025b).

Bilateral agencies have been partnering with India in various projects, including vocational training through the dual system (such as GIZ from Germany), technical education (such as JICA from Japan), and teacher education (such as the British Council from the UK and USAID from the US).

Since 2025, Foreign Higher Education Institutions have been allowed to open campuses in India, bringing competition and international standards (Niti Aayog, 2025a). This has been

²⁸ Taking decisions based on the merit of the situation and not aligning with the US or the Soviet Camp during the Cold War.

altering the Indian education landscape in terms of infrastructure, fees, quality, extra-curricular activities, diversity of offers and target groups, and so on.

Financing of LLL

The following representation (Table 1 and Figure 1) shows the expenditure on the education of adults across all five strands, 2014 onwards, since the current regime is in place. Notably, the budget allocation for higher education (general, technical and vocational) (strand 1) and professional education (strand 2) is clubbed together in the budget, and no separate figures are available in the public domain regarding the same.

Table 1: Total Expenditure (Actual) by Union, States and Union Territories (Combined) for the education of adults as a percentage of India's GDP (real) 2014-15 to 2025-26

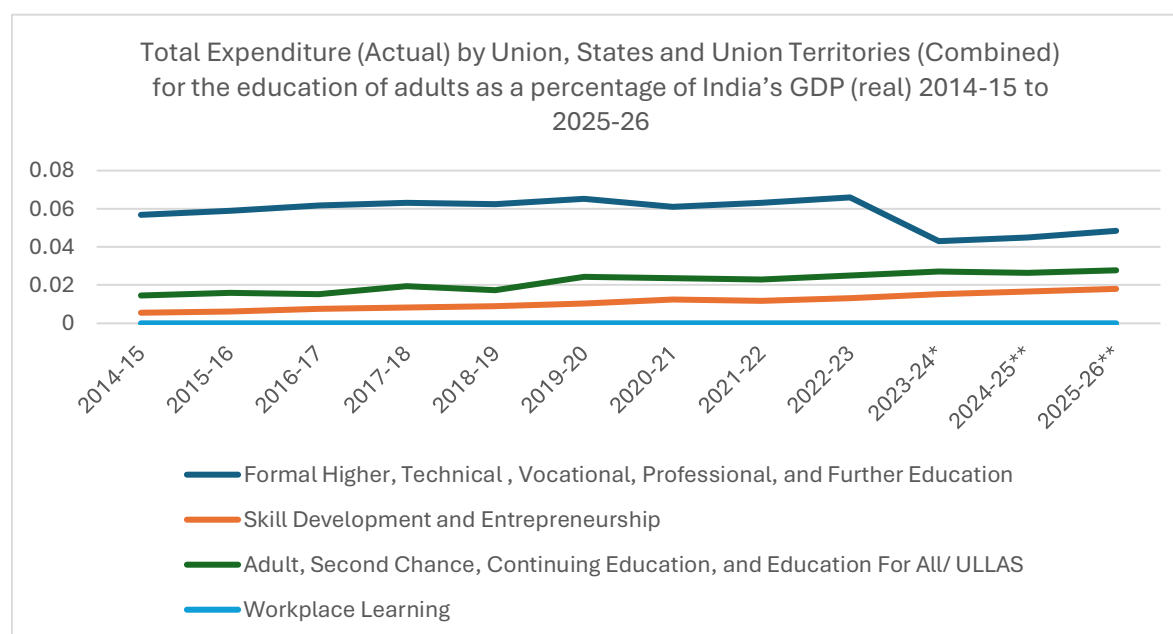
Budget Heads for public funding	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24*	2024-25**	2025-26**
Formal Higher, Technical, Vocational and Professional, and Further Education	0.82	0.85	0.89	0.91	0.90	0.94	0.88	0.91	0.95	1.02	1.05	1.10
Skill Development and Entrepreneurship	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.15	0.18	0.17	0.19	0.22	0.24	0.26
Adult, Second Chance, Continuing Education, and Education For All/ ULLAS	0.21	0.23	0.22	0.28	0.25	0.35	0.34	0.33	0.36	0.39	0.38	0.40
Workplace Learning	Less than 0.001	Less than 0.001	0.001	Less than 0.001	0.002	Less than 0.002	0.003	0.004	0.005	0.007	0.010	0.012

*Data is based on Revised Estimate.

** Data is based on Budget Estimate and not Actual Expenditure

Source: Created by the author based on the Ministry of Finance (n.d.)

Figure 1: Total Expenditure (Actual) by Union, States and Union Territories (Combined) for the education of adults as a percentage of India's GDP (real) 2014-15 to 2025-26



Source: Created by the author based on the Ministry of Finance (n.d.)

The case of adult education (renamed as Education for All) is worse. Under the ULLAS program, which has five components, including foundational and functional literacy, critical life skills and vocational education and skills training, funding is allocated for the first two components, i.e. *foundational and functional literacy* only. The latter three have no funding provisions at all. This is evident from the funding and reporting *pro forma*, for instance, which includes literacy only. The funding for literacy is restricted to the development and dissemination of teaching and training material, training of trainers and multipliers, and assessments. No funding is allocated for imparting literacy skills on the ground, implying that *adult educators* should be *unpaid volunteers*, and this work should be considered as their duty to the nation. It is made *mandatory* by the Ministry of Education for students in most contexts by linking it to assessment, evaluation or academic credits (see All India Council of Technical Education, 2023; University Grants Commission, 2023; National Council for Teacher Education, 2024; Ministry of Education, n.d.). It is claimed that the digital platform OTLAS may significantly reduce the costs of imparting literacy. This ignores the fact that digital access and competencies comprise a major challenge for those who are supposed to be the target group for literacy, and India has the largest number of people *without internet access* globally (Statista, 2025). Relying on self-directed non-literates to help themselves, mandatory voluntarism, limited digital access and low competencies appear rather unrealistic (Singh, 2024). Furthermore, since there are no guidelines,

structure, reporting mechanism, or resource allocation for the rest of the components - namely vocational skills, critical life skills, and continuing education- they appear to be *symbolically* included in the policy (See Annexures in Ministry of Education, 2022). The administrative and implementing units (*Samajik Chetana Kendras*, translated as community awareness centres) in the States that implement the ULLAS program, therefore, often restrict their contributions to components other than literacy to guidance and counselling regarding vocational education (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Apart from the state, the corporate sector is another prominent source of resources. According to Indian law, corporations of a certain size are required to spend 2% of their net profits on *Corporate Social Responsibility* (Government of India, 2013). Education receives the largest share of these funds (about USD\$ 118 Mio in 2024-25, see PRIME Database Group, 2025), usually in alignment with government schemes to support their implementation (Government of India, 2013). In 2022, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs reduced the transparency of the provision by amending the format for disclosure of spending information (PRIME Database Group, 2025). Certain news reports and petitions in courts suggest that a large share of these funds has been channelled towards the *PM (Prime Minister) Cares Fund* without adequate transparency in information (Mishra, 2026).

Prior to 2014, NGOs supported educational initiatives rather actively and independently. This changed after 2014, as several NGOs have been shut down or their funding channels are restricted due to increasing state intervention and challenging compliance mechanisms, except for a few (International Commission of Jurists, 2020). Funds from enterprises have been channelled to the Prime Minister's Fund or other state-led schemes (Goel & Schmall, 2021). Furthermore, off-budget allocations have grown in general, while financial flows are becoming increasingly difficult to map (Blaggrave & Gonguet, 2020).

The role of sectors and involvement of community stakeholders

The strand of formal higher education after secondary school, which includes general, technical, vocational, professional, and further education, comes under the formal sector. Skill training, part of vocational education, adult education, continuing education, second-chance education, extension, and Education For All come under the non-formal sector. The categorisation of workplace learning depends on the context. It may come under either formal or non-formal, depending upon the provider and the mode of the offer.

In India, policies are formulated by the bureaucracy (civil servants and consultants) in alignment with the government's political agendas. In the Centre and the States ruled by the same party as the one in the Centre, the Prime Minister's Office dominates. In States ruled by opposition parties, the Chief Minister's office dominates. Constitutionally, policies need to be proposed and discussed in the Centre and State Legislatures and are open for Judicial Review. Several public or autonomous agencies established under various legal provisions, experts, foreign institutions (such as UNESCO), funding agencies, investors (such as the World Bank or huge companies), or civil society organisations may influence through research reports, policy briefs or as members of expert bodies, boards, etc.

Since 2014, policy formulation has become significantly centred around the Prime Minister's Office and the interests of selective business houses (Varshney, 2024; The Times of India, 2026). Public agencies, international organisations (especially if they invest), or consultancy services are chosen by the government for selective inputs. Educational or research institutions may provide inputs through research, policy briefs, and so on, while social partners may provide inputs through requests, open letters, or even protests. Civil society actors might work to fill the gaps when issues are left unaddressed by the state, and social media may highlight several crucial components. Still, the frequency of such interventions and their influence is often contextual. In most cases, stakeholders need to align with the government policy and follow the relevant guidelines to be effectively engaged in the process.

In a nutshell, the stakeholders often remain policy implementers and recipients of benefits rather than critical contributors. Data suggest that academic freedom in India has been declining since 2014 (Scholars at Risk, 2024; Kinzelbach et al., 2026). Museums, galleries, parks, and other centres of learning, developed by the government, educational institutions, the private sector or civil society, are considered entertaining means of learning but appear to have a limited role in shaping policies. However, the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (RSS) is an exception to this. It is the Centre government's unofficial *think tank* and has major policy influence in education policy, ranging from access, curriculum, appointments, and so on (Lall & Anand, 2022; Joshee, 2024).

The tracking of the effective implementation of policies

The tracking of the effective implementation of policies in India is done by several public agencies and international investors, such as the World Bank, which require data to release

funding. In the case of education, the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) under the NITI Aayog (the government's think tank and planning body) is the primary monitoring agency, supported by several digital portals (such as E-Samiksha, DARPAN, Prayas, and PRAGATI), monitoring by specific ministries, and audits by the Ministry of Finance. For instance, the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) tracks higher education data; ULLAS (and OTLAS, i.e. Online Teaching Learning Assessment System) tracks literacy, second chance education and continuing education data; Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) tracks data on skill education and training; and All India Council of Technical Education Portals (like Project PRACTICE) track data regarding industry and academia alignment in relation to internships and work-based learning. Since the informal sector is huge (87-92% depending upon the nature of work and contracts) and highly unregulated, specific information (and data) regarding this strand is rather limited. With the availability of abundant cheap labour, a labour-intensive (rather than knowledge-intensive) labour market and laws framed in alignment with crony capitalism, learning opportunities may remain limited to compliance checklists.

The monitoring agencies may collect data from the implementing agencies independently or through tracking systems. These reports are further audited by the *Comptroller and Auditor General of India* and shared with international organisations or agencies such as UNESCO to populate the international monitoring architecture and showcase India's approach to international commitments. International organisations like the International Labour Organisation or the World Bank may collect data for specific projects.

India is still in the process of further developing and strengthening its monitoring and tracking architecture to ensure standardised (for example, even spending figures), systematic, timely, regular and transparent provisions in alignment with the National Education Policy 2020 and other recent policy provisions. Such a system in India, which can act as a base for effective, evidence-informed policies in favour of the population, is critically necessary, but at the same time, difficult to achieve under the current policy structure.

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Annexure: Mapping provisions for the education of adults in India since independence (1947)

Period	1947-1966	1966- 1976	1976-1991	1991-2007	2007-2014	2014 onwards
General Description	Context: Independence-establishment of democracy with meagre resources, gigantic challenges and political will in favour of existing Western System. Education policy came under territorial units called <i>States</i> in India. 1st 5-Year Plan (1951-56): Foundations and basic access to as many as possible 2nd 5-Year Plan (1956-61): Linking education to industrialisation 3rd 5-Year Plan (1961-66): universal basic education Foundational phase: Key institutions and basic regulatory framework	Context: Political upheaval due to wars, demise of two Prime Ministers in office, natural calamities causing famines (serious food dependency on imports) and a resulting foreign exchange crisis. 4th 5-Year Plan (1969-74): socio-economic development, self-reliance by increasing everyone's participation. Green Revolution for food grains (1966-67), White Revolution for dairy (1970 onwards). 5th 5-Year Plan (1974-79): Poverty alleviation, access to everyone	Context: Political upheaval and changes in 1975 (suspension of democracy), 1976 (coming of nationalists in power). In 1976, education became a common policy area shared between the <i>States</i> and the central federal authority called <i>Union</i>. 6th 5-Year Plan (1980-85): Poverty alleviation through human resource development, rural development, reaching out to the masses for increasing participation in development process. In 1984 new political leadership with focus on technology, and empowerment	Context: Severe financial crisis in 1991 and imposition of World Bank (WB) conditionalities in return of financial assistance from it. 8th 5-Year Plan (1992-97): Economic Liberalization and Privatization National Education Policy, 1986 was revised in 1992, to align with WB guidelines; India committed to certain international initiatives and thereby aligned its policy accordingly. 9th 5-Year Plan (1997-2002): Growth with social justice and equity, focus on increasing access. 10th 5-Year Plan (2002-07): Economic growth, poverty reduction, reducing gender gaps and preparing the transition towards	Context: Global economic crisis, 2008 acted as a window of opportunity for shifting the agenda to skills and employability (already mentioned in the previous 5-Year Plan). Merger of general and technical higher education and professional education under one authority governed by the Ministry of HRD was recommended in 2009 (<i>Yashpal Committee Report</i>). 11th 5-Year Plan (2007-2012): Faster and inclusive growth, sustainability (long-term investments in outcome-based education), gender parity, quality enhancement; and an urgent emphasis on skills (short-term, cost-effective solution for increasing labour force participation, inclusion, and reducing social burden, as quickly as possible)	Context: Major political change with the far-right in power; replacement of the 5-Year-Plans model with annual plans. Restructuring Phase: Since 2014, old structures, stakeholders, and processes are replaced by new ones, manifested in National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. Further privatization, digitalisation, and restructuring of the existing system, still in alignment with further merger of educational sectors. General and technical higher education is proposed to merge under one authority, further merger of vocational, skills and workplace learning programs under one regulating authority. AE is already

	established against a fragmenting society along linguistic lines. various sectors of education described and demarcated; education considered a means to achieve economic development through industrialisation; differential treatment of target groups based on returns on investments; Commissions' recommendations were treated as policy guidelines.	Developmental Phase: 1st National Education Policy (NEP), 1968 introduced; further establishment of key institutions and elaboration of regulatory frameworks	(through access and rights) came. 7th 5-Year Plan (1985-90): Economic productivity, social justice and inclusion of women and the marginalised. Expansion Phase: Nationwide initiatives and consolidation, increase in access with focus on technology (especially computers), quality enhancement. 2nd National Education Policy, 1986 introduced. Departments of Education, youth, sports, culture, and women and child development under various Ministries merged, and a new Ministry Human Resource Development (HRD) was established in 1985.	knowledge economy. Preparation for participation in the global economic competition began in early 2000s when the economy became stronger again. National Knowledge Commission was appointed in 2005 to prepare India's transition towards a knowledge economy. Privatization and Alignment with International Goals Phase: While most state resources were channeled to primary education and gender parity, education for adults was left largely to privatization. Some resources were available for the marginalised and for basic literacy/non-formal programs which remained in survival mode. Private institutions gradually grew, and the numbers exploded as the IT sector boom came, and the demand for quality	Skills, Further Privatization and Internationalisation Phase: A characteristic of transition towards knowledge economy, merger of education policies began where irrespective of the providers and the processes, outcomes are relevant. At higher education level, general higher and vocational education started merging; at middle level vocational (formal), skills (non-formal/ unemployed/ employed) and workplace (formal education and unemployed i.e. apprenticeship/ non-formal and employed, i.e. OJT) and adult education (post-literacy and second chance/continuing education for dropouts) started merging. The focus was now on outcomes defined in the National Skills Qualifications Framework. Focus on quality and internationalisation to remain at par with the global knowledge	discontinued (in terms of resources and infrastructure) and restructured as <i>Education for All</i> (not to be confused with the global Education For All movement) with a focus on school education. Unfortunately, there are several gaps in the policy design. Contradictory provisions and <i>empty signifiers</i> (policy terms not backed by resources) are making the implementation process challenging. Impact evaluation process, outcomes, and data transparency is significantly low.
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				higher education increased.	economy competition was emphasised.	
General and Technical Higher Education	Foundations of general higher education architecture developed by establishing apex institution for general higher education (University Grants Commission) in (1953) which laid down the guidelines and regulatory framework for higher education institutions (1956); Evaluation of the existing system recommending closer connection between education and developmental needs. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) inherited (established 1945) from colonial period was included as a department in the Ministry of Education; clear	Focus on research through Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR, established 1968) for promoting research in social sciences and humanities; internationalisation (knowledge sharing) encouraged. The objectives included sharing the benefits of higher education with the society; developing evidence-based policies to address social challenges; mobilizing communities to participate and benefit from development. In technical higher education, closer linkage between industry and technical institutions aimed at manpower planning for	Nationwide quality standards, regulations, schemes, entrance exams introduced and developed for centralization and standardisation of education with a focus on quality standards, access, equal opportunities, labour market-relevant curricula, and inculcation of scientific temperament and values. In technical higher education, focus on computer education, open distance education courses in computer offered; closer linkage between education and industry developed through advisory committees, AICTE strengthened in 1987 with	Private institutions grew while demand increased, and state funding declined (became gradually limited); a National Accreditation Assessment Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 for quality assurance, standardisation, and achievement-based resource allocation from whatever meagre resources were available. Policy recommendations by industrialists, several judicial decisions, and state support expanded the number and scope of private higher education institutions. In technical higher education, IT revolution created demand for engineering colleges. While public investment declined under World Bank conditions, private investments in	Internationalisation promoted by restructuring offers for compatibility in terms of structure, content and evaluation. In 2013, reforms in quality, infrastructure and human resource were introduced in State institutions. In 2014, Vocational Education degrees were included in higher education through streams like automotive, retail, healthcare, beauty and wellness, media, etc. (not regulated as technical higher education). In technical higher education, detailed quality control guidelines introduced for public funding and institutional rankings under the national Board of Accreditation (earlier a part of AICTE, now made stronger and autonomous); World Bank assisted quality enhancement initiative	Centralization and restructuring of education through norms, regulations, processes, and quality criteria that should make alignment with international higher education, and merger between general and technical higher education possible under the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). Foreign direct investments invited and changes in credits, flexibility in entry/exit in courses, more disciplinary choices, provisions for internships and exposure to the labour market, Introduction of a national online platform (SWAYAM) for all types of general, technical, higher, vocational, skill and workplace learning courses (MOOCs) under a PPP model) under process.

	demarcation between natural science in general higher education and technical higher education (engineering degree) that could benefit heavy industrialisation directly. Few best-in-class institutions (<i>Indian Institutes of Technology</i>) were established for meritorious students established since 1956 and rural technical higher education architecture (engineering colleges) developed gradually to support agriculture, mining etc. (predominant economic sector) and local development.	industries. Institutional architecture expanded (more institutions and better infrastructure), research and knowledge sharing (among IITs and rural engineering colleges for e.g. through faculty development) encouraged.	regulatory powers, focusing on quality and infrastructure.	engineering colleges led to explosion in number, but deteriorated quality. Judicial intervention promoted privatization by protecting the autonomy of private institutions over fee, admissions and admirative structure, while quality declined. Publicly funded autonomous institutions (IIITs and NITs) were established, World Bank-assisted quality control initiatives were introduced (Phase I, 2002/03-08) but quality continued to decline while private institutions continued to grow.	continued (Phase II, 2010-14) with focus on quality learning outcomes; Engineering colleges started declining because of less enrolments (market saturation) and quality concerns.	
Professional Education (professions imply specific knowledge,	Development and revision of existing colonial provisions (for nurses, doctors, chartered accountants and	1972- architecture was included in professional education overlapping with AICTE's	NEP, 1986 emphasised on developing updating and enriching professional	New professional norms and ethics developed and included in the quality control of professional education in private institutions,	In 2009, education became a right for every child and professional norms for teachers were revised accordingly.	Restructuring of the existing system in terms of new governance bodies replacing the old ones, restructuring of

ethical code, entry/exit barriers like membership, and are involve practice)	related work, pharmacists, advocates, managers); establishment of key <i>professional associations</i> or <i>councils</i> which provide membership/ validation to work as a professional (<i>professional practice</i>); establishment of key institutions (chartered accounting, medical and nursing etc.) under various Ministries (e.g. health, commerce etc.), and not under the Ministry of Education or Labour.	jurisdiction; formal professional education expanded especially through establishment of institutions and introduction of professional courses.	education by changes in curricula, strengthening the linkages with research, exposure to workplaces during study, strengthening of professional ethics and codes of conduct, possibilities for continuing education in the profession, and restructuring of both AICTE and profile of various professional councils to avoid overlapping and conflicts.	raising serious quality concerns about the quality of professional practice. Professional courses expanded as new areas were introduced due to change in the economic structure (privatization)	Centralized national entrance exams introduced for access to professional courses, autonomy to institutions	curriculum and bringing in more areas for work as professional education (e.g. allied healthcare). In NEP, 2020, all professional education is proposed to be merged with general and technical higher education except for medical and legal education that should be partially merged.
Vocational Education and Skills Training Skills training began post-2008 as a branch of training outside	<i>Industrial Training Institutes</i> (ITIs) for middle-level technical workforce (vocational diploma), regulated by the National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT), established in 1956 under the	Vocational Education integrated with formal school education by offers included as a part of school education - step towards destigmatization and increasing participation.	Non-formal courses introduced for employability of those who needed industry jobs and could not study further or were previously adult education target groups including those without	Formal vocational offers were restructured into shorter, stackable courses with multiple entry/exit provisions which meant students could decide the duration and exit accordingly with a	Vocational courses in formal education expanded (vertically downward for lower grades/ choice of subjects in schools, and upward as degree programs in higher education), followed by a national vocational education qualifications	2014- Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship constituted, skill development programs under all initiatives moved under this ministry. Therefore, there are three types of programs now under

schools and polytechnics. In general, vocational education includes in-depth knowledge whereas skills include practical hands-on short-term courses. However, the meaning and governance of vocational education and skills training has been changed several times.	Ministry of Labour and Employment. Target group included school (formal education) pass outs after grade 8/10 belonging to marginalised social layers.		access to formal education, youth in rural and tribal areas, school dropouts, women, other socio-economically marginalised populations, and people with informal skills. Women polytechnics established, focus on female participation enhanced.	certificate, diploma etc. ITIs upgraded following a public-private-partnership (PPP) model leading to an upgradation of infrastructure and human resources, and closer industry-ITI partnerships.	framework (NVEQF) in 2011. All the non-formal vocational courses were brought under the Skills Development Initiative 2008 launched under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, regulated by the NCVT. A National Skills Development Policy was launched in 2009 marking a shift from supply-driven, institution-oriented vocational education to a demand -driven, multi-provider, multi-stakeholder skills ecosystem through PPP Model. A national architecture comprising an apex body (National Skills Development Corporation) (2008); Sector Skills Councils to regulate standards in industrial sectors created. Skill development courses included a large number of non-formal. short-term, practice-based courses for school dropouts and those with informal learning.	vocational education 1) (formal - in schools, polytechnics, universities aimed at deeper knowledge and skills); 2) skill training (short-term, flexible, non-formal courses for quick employability as per market needs); and 3) workplace learning (Apprenticeship programs). The formal programs are under Ministry of Education, non-formal programs, apprenticeship programs, and industry training are under Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Since 2014, OJT is made flexible as per industry needs (in terms of curricula, provisions, providers (including outsourcing). In the NEP 2020, skill hubs (specialized centres with best-in-class infrastructure and human resources) are proposed for skill development and OJT.
Workplace Learning, On-the-job training, primarily aligned with Industrial policy. Earlier it covered apprenticeship	Provisions for On-Job-Training (OJT) for workers in hazardous areas, those needing rehabilitation/ change of employment especially due to medical problems; and developing	OJT made mandatory in industry for all fresh graduates, jointly governed by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Ministry of Education.	Vocational education in schools merged with apprenticeship by creating pathways for certification, diploma and degree in vocational education and apprenticeship	Responsibility as providers of apprenticeship training extended to medium-sized establishments		

ip training but gradually, a large part was moved to skills training.	close industry-education partnership through training and testing provisions for industry workers in ITIs (outsourced for saving costs and ensuring quality); Central Training Institutes for upskilling instructors and workers; making it mandatory for big establishments to act as providers of apprenticeships (Apprentices Act, 1961); development of guidelines, curriculum and other requirements for apprenticeship training in industry under the Central Apprenticeship Council, and Regional Directorates of Apprenticeship Training (established in 1962)		training in 1986, jointly managed by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of HRD. Safety training in hazardous industry became a right (rather than employers' responsibility) in 1987.		Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was introduced in 2009 as a part of the Skills Policy, especially for those who were informally employed without any skills recognition, thereby merging the recognition of vocational education, skills training, and workplace learning in the informal sector (about 90% of the economy). A National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) was established in 2013, which replaced the vocational education qualifications framework and aligned all provisions included vocational education, skills and workplace learning unless they come under higher education.	Since 2023, all establishments are supposed to channel their Corporate Social Responsibility Funds towards apprenticeship, internships, or industrial training of unemployed youth (between 21-24 years) not enrolled in full-time study programs. If required, gig workers are now eligible for training as well.
Adult Education, Adult	AE considered equally important as universal basic	Functional literacy programs for farmers (1967-68),	Nationwide literacy programs launched (1978, 1986, and	Literacy programs became limited to	2007- <i>Adult Education and Skill Development Scheme</i> merged literacy, post-	NEP 2020 includes a section on <i>AE and Life Long Learning</i> ,

Education and Skills Development , and Education for All	education; 2 literacy programs- <i>Social Education</i> (1951-56) to strengthen democracy and curtail communism, and village literacy campaign (<i>Gram Shiksha Mohim</i> , 1959 onwards) started; National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), established 1961, developed the curriculum for AE	women (1975-76) to mobilize non-literate, school dropout population for participating in boosting agricultural production and dairy to fuel the Green and White Revolutions and labor-intensive work in mining and industry	1988, and 1988-89); nationwide institutional architecture created (including national and State-level institutions); 2 nd National Education Policy, 1986 described <i>lifelong education</i> as a goal and included <i>AE and Non-formal Education</i> in the mainstream; Further Education promoted through open distance learning; post-literacy and continuing education (second-chance education after dropping out) programs launched in 1990.	basic literacy and post literacy initiatives. In 1994, formal school certification (equivalent to school grades 3, 5 and 8) started for literacy learners to provide pathways for formal education	literacy and continuing education with skills in the 11 th 5-year-plan. Literate India (<i>Saakshar Bharat</i>) Mission was launched In 2009 for civic engagement through basic and functional literacy, and skills training for subsistence livelihood (like tailoring, beauty and make-up) where learners were not able to benefit from skill development programs. Further pathways were created for skill development of learners after these AE programs.	treating LLL as a part of AE. The existing structure of AE is dissolved, funding for delivery of AE to participants is cut down to zero, relying on <i>compulsory, unpaid volunteerism</i> by students, teachers and other selected public servant groups. In 2022, AE was renamed as <i>Education For All</i> followed by the NIL (New India Literacy) Program renamed within 3 months (June 2022) as <i>ULLAS (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All)</i> , for the period 2022-27. Apart from literacy (basic and functional), leisure (like painting) some vocational and skills training programs (for subsistence livelihood) are also included for neo-literates who are unable to access skills training offers because of competency gaps.
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