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A Comprehensive Analysis of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan Program-An Integrated Scheme

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Abstract

India has achieved notable advancements in increasing the number of literate individuals, disparities between genders continue to exist, and a substantial segment of the population still lacks basic reading and writing skills. Quality primary education is crucial, but challenges like learning deficiencies and out-of-school children persist. The Sustainable Development Goals prioritize universal access to quality education by 2030. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan aims to address these challenges by amalgamating various education schemes and focusing on equity and inclusivity. This paper analyzes the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, highlighting its impact, challenges, and policy recommendations. Key areas include integrated planning, quality interventions, vocational education, monitoring mechanisms, and community engagement. Despite successes, challenges like resource constraints and socio-cultural barriers remain. Policy modifications aligned with the National Education Policy 2020 are proposed to enhance effectiveness. Through the utilization of specific tactics, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan can further its objective of providing inclusive, fair, and top-notch education for every individual in India.

Keywords: Literacy rates, Gender disparities, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Quality education, Policy recommendations.

Introduction

Education stands as an inherent entitlement for every child and serves as a potent driver for socio- economic advancement. Despite improvements in literacy and enrollment ratios, India continues to grapple with issues of out-of-school children, dropouts, learning deficiencies, equity gaps and quality concerns in school education (MoE, 2014). The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan/Integrated Scheme for School Education (ISSE) attempts to provide a comprehensive, district-level solution to these multifaceted challenges by converging various existing schemes and interventions under one overarching program (Samagra Siksha draft document, MHRD, 2017).

While India has made notable strides in enhancing access to education and increasing literacy levels among its population, reaching 76.32% in 2022 compared to just 40.76% in 1981. Despite these advancements, a considerable gender disparity persists, with literacy rates among females still lagging behind those of males. While India has made strides in education, approximately 335.6 million people remain illiterate as of 2022, highlighting the need for continued efforts to achieve comprehensive literacy. Despite India's progress in education, a significant portion of its population, approximately 335.6 million people as of 2022, remains illiterate according to the statistics which indicate a 23.68% illiteracy rate in the overall population of approx. 1.41 billion (O'Neill, 2024).

Quality Primary Education is essential for developing basic literacy and numeracy skills in children. Despite this, a substantial proportion, A staggering 70% of children aged 10 in low and middle-income countries struggle to comprehend basic reading materials, a sobering statistic that underscores the pivotal role of primary education in not only fostering a child's holistic development but also breaking the cyclical transmission of poverty across generations. Moreover, it lays the foundation for economic growth and social harmony within communities. The Sustainable Development Goals target universal access to equitable, free and high-quality primary education by 2030, with a focus on foundational literacy and numeracy. Achieving this requires prioritizing marginalized children, enhancing education quality through improved curricula and teacher training, and

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embracing innovative strategies like digital learning (UNICEF, 2023).

The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for Primary Education witnessed a significant surge from 1971 to 2023. Beginning at 60% in 1971, it progressively rose to 66% by 1981, 71% by 1991, and 85% by 2001, ultimately reaching 99% in 2023. The highest recorded GER was 109% in 2008, which gradually declined to 108% by 2022. GER for primary schooling is computed by dividing the number of students enrolled in primary education, irrespective of age, by the corresponding population officially designated for primary education age group, then multiplying by 100 (World Bank Open Data, 2023).

The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in Secondary Schools experienced an increase from 54% in 2005 to 73.8% in 2019 (World Bank).

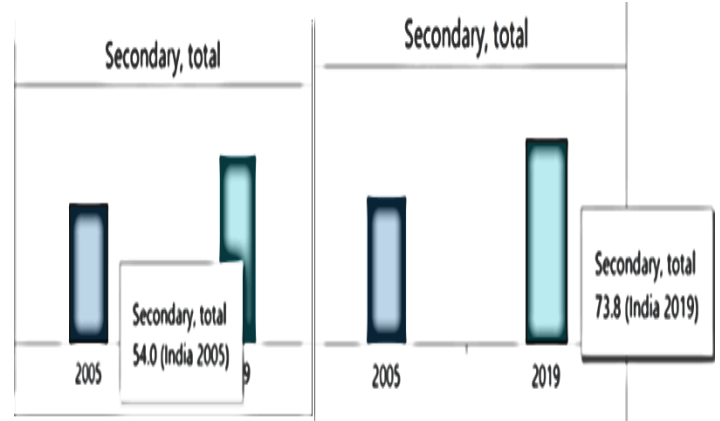**Figure 1. GER at primary level (India). Source: World bank data report, (2022)**

Figure 2. GER at secondary level (India). Source: World bank data report (2005-2009)

Various education schemes, both at the Union and State levels, strive to ensure equitable education, improve access, promote equity, and enhance educational quality. The government of India launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000-01, a comprehensive program striving to make elementary education accessible to all. This initiative gained further momentum with the 2009 enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act. Concurrently, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) endeavored to universalize secondary education access by 2017 and ensure student retention by 2020. Moreover, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Restructuring and

Reorganization of TE (Teacher Education) focused on enhancing teacher training programs and providing academic resource support, thereby complementing the overarching goals of improving educational quality and access. Despite improvements in elementary education, there's a pressing need to expand Secondary Education due to a significant number of out-of-school children, especially girls, facing challenges like early marriage and employment. State and district priorities still lean towards elementary education over secondary education. Introduced in 2018-19, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan initiative sought to adopt a comprehensive, integrated approach towards addressing India's educational challenges, integrating SSA, RMSA, and TE to enhance school effectiveness and learning outcomes, with a particular focus on gender equity and bridging social category gaps. SSA 2018 aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, targeting equitable and quality primary and secondary education by 2030. The scheme emphasizes outcome-based approaches, highlighting the need for cohesive efforts across all levels of education governance (Kundu et al., 2020). The policy strives for the universalization of education from pre-school to secondary level, targeting a 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in school education by the year 2030 (Nimeshwari & Saxena, 2022).

Objectives of the SSA 2018 Scheme

- Support the implementation of the NEP 2020.
- Support states in enforcing the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009.
- Prioritize early childhood care and education initiatives.
- Emphasize developing strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Implement a comprehensive, integrated, inclusive curriculum with activity-based learning to impart 21st-century competencies.
- Deliver quality education to enhance student learning outcomes.
- Bridge social and gender gaps in school education access and achievement.
- Ensure equity and inclusion are upheld across all educational levels.
- Strengthen state educational research councils and teacher training institutes.

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- Foster safe, secure, and conducive environments for learning.
- Promote vocational education (Samagra Shiksha, MHRD)

The paramount goal remains to ensure every child has the opportunity to receive an inclusive, high-quality education that caters to their diverse backgrounds, multicultural and multilingual needs, and varying academic abilities, thereby fostering active engagement in the learning process. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the continuation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, Samagra Shiksha, from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2026 with an approximate outlay of ₹ 294283.04 crore. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG-4) and harmonized with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this scheme's primary objective is to ensure inclusive, equitable, high-quality, and holistic school education, focused on providing all children with access to quality education in an inclusive classroom environment that addresses their diverse needs and encourages active participation in the learning process (Samagra Siksha Scheme).

Background and Context

The 'Education for All Campaign,' known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Hindi, is a flagship initiative launched by the Indian government, with the aim of ensuring universal access to elementary education within a predetermined timeframe. The 86th constitutional amendment made free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 a fundamental right (Article 21A), encompassing an estimated 206 million children in 2001. This pioneering 'Education for All' initiative, known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), was spearheaded by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, with the initial goal of providing education to all children within the 6 to 14 age group by 2010, although the deadline has been extended indefinitely. While SSA commenced as an intervention program in 2002, its operations began in 2000-2001, tracing its origins back to 1993-1994 when the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched to realize universal primary education, covering 272 districts across 18 states, with funding shared between the central government (85%) and state governments (15%), supported by external agencies such as the World Bank, DFID, and UNICEF,

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committing over $1.5 billion and benefiting 50 million children by 2001. The Right to Education Act, which came into force on April 1, 2010, provided legal backing for the implementation of SSA, with an initial outlay of ₹7,000 crore, and in 2011-12, the Indian government allocated ₹21,000 crore ($2.6 billion), representing a 40% increase from the previous year, aimed at providing quality community-owned elementary education nationwide, thereby enhancing human capabilities for all children through a mission-oriented approach (Samagra Siksha).

Launched in March 2009, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) scheme aimed to boost the enrollment rate from 52.26% in 2005-06 to 75% at the secondary education level. Its key objectives included adhering to educational standards, addressing barriers related to gender, socioeconomic status, and disabilities, achieving universal access to secondary education by 2017, and ensuring universal retention by 2020. Infrastructure development under RMSA involved constructing additional classrooms, labs, libraries, and residential hostels. Quality enhancement measures focused on reducing student-teacher ratios, strengthening STEM

education, providing teacher training, and undertaking curriculum reforms. Equity interventions targeted micro-planning, prioritizing certain schools, and conducting special enrollment drives. The implementation relied on state government societies, with direct funding from the central government. Revised norms introduced in 2013 aimed to streamline construction costs, enhance monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, integrate related schemes, extend benefits to aided schools, and maintain the existing funding ratios between the central and state governments (RMSA, Ministry of Education).

SSA was merged with RMSA to form Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, although currently Teacher Education is also part of it year 2018 (Samagra Siksha website).

Objectives of the Study

- To critically examine the key indicators of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2018) scheme, which includes GER, Drinking water availability, Useable toilets, Library books, Mid-day meal and Computer availability for children, and basic literacy and Numeracy among children at elementary level and its

alignment with the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP).

- To conduct a SWOC analysis to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges of the SSA 2018.

- To critically analyze the impact of the SSA 2018 scheme on various stakeholders, particularly students, teachers, and communities.

Methodology

This paper employs document analysis and policy evaluation methodologies. The data sources utilized include the Samagra Shiksha scheme and its official government website, UNICEF documents, World Bank data, government reports, and scholarly literature on the SSA 2018 scheme. The electronic databases searched to locate relevant articles were Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate, and other peer-reviewed publications. The screening process involved filtering articles based on specific criteria: (a) excluding articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, (b) removing duplicate articles, and (c) After reviewing the full texts, studies were excluded if they did not align with the primary research objectives. During the

screening process, 3 duplicate articles were removed. Out of the remaining 36 articles, 8 were further excluded based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Subsequently, after a preliminary review of the remaining 28 articles, 11 articles were eliminated from the list due to their titles, abstracts, themes, and study areas being irrelevant to the research. Ultimately, 17 articles were included in the study.

Policy Analysis

The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2018) program encompasses various key indicators (based on SSA, 2001 and RMSA, 2009) and strategies aimed at improving the quality of education and ensuring inclusive access to schooling.

Integrated Planning and Management: SSA 2018 promotes coordinated efforts among stakeholders for effective policy implementation, facilitating resource allocation, curriculum development, and infrastructure enhancement (Singh & Singh, 2018).

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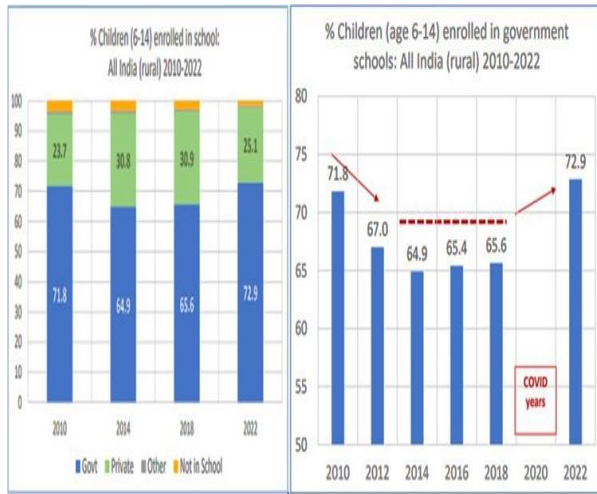
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Figure 3. Percentage of children (age 6-14) enrolled in school: All India (rural) 2010- 2022 and percentage of children (age 6-14) enrolled in Government school: All India (rural) 2010-2022. Source: ASER, 2022

According to the data presented in figure 3, the enrollment rates for children aged 6-14 in rural India have consistently remained at exceptionally high levels over the past decade. Starting at 96.6% in 2010, the overall enrollment rate steadily increased to reach 98.4% by 2022, indicating a sustained upward trajectory. Simultaneously, the percentage of these children attending government schools nationwide experienced fluctuations – an initial decline from 2010 to 2014, followed by a period of stabilization until 2018, and then a notable 7.3 percentage point increase from 2018 to 2022. Despite

variations across states, the overarching trend reflects a rise in government school enrollment between 2018 and 2022.

According to the ASER report of 2022 shown in figure 4, there has been an uptick in several key indicators regarding school infrastructure and resources between 2018 and 2022. These indicators include the availability of drinking water, functional toilets, library books, mid-day meals, and access to computers for children. Furthermore, many sports-related indicators have remained consistent with the levels observed in 2018. For instance, in 2022, approximately 68.9% of schools reported having a playground, showing a slight increase from 66.5% in 2018. Furthermore, the ASER report of 2022 revealed that approximately 80% of primary schools had integrated Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) activities into their curricula, with a comparable percentage having at least one teacher trained in FLN pedagogy.
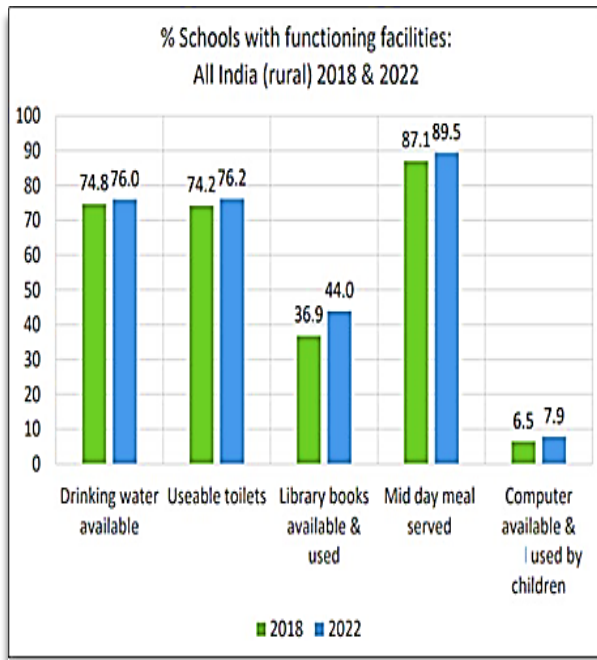
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Figure 4. Depicting the percentage of rural schools across India with operational facilities, comparing data from 2018 and 2022. Source: ASER (2022)

- Focus on Quality Interventions: SSA 2018 prioritizes teacher training, curriculum reforms, and pedagogical innovations to enhance learning outcomes and improve education delivery (Gupta, 2019).

As depicted in figure 5, there is minimal to no disparity in the learning levels across genders among children in India. However, variations exist across states and regions. For example, in all southern states and in Maharashtra, girls outperform boys in both

reading and arithmetic tasks in Grade V and Grade VIII (ASER, 2022).
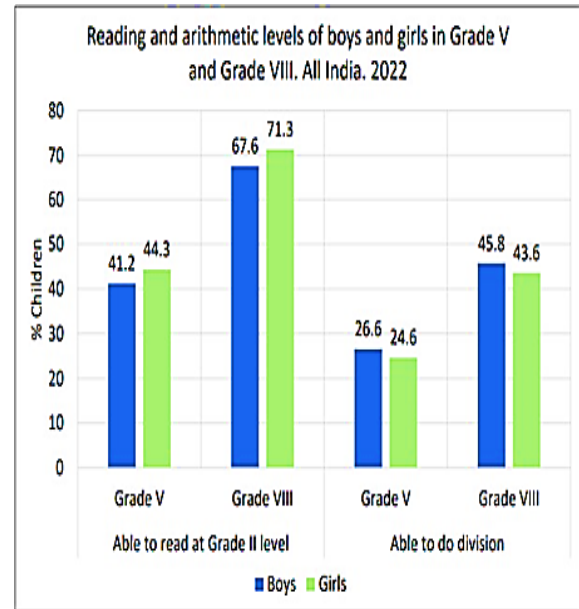

Figure 5. Illustrating the reading and arithmetic proficiency levels of fifth and eighth grade boys and girls across India in 2022. Source: ASER (2022)

SWOC Analysis of Samagra Siksha Abhiyan

Strengths

- Integrated Approach: SSA covers all levels of education comprehensively (Tikku & Kohli, 2020). In fact, the recently adopted NEP 2020 aims to ensure that secondary education is accessible to all by 2030 (Singh et al., 2023).

- Increased Funding: Augmented financial resources through higher

budgetary allocation facilitate enhanced implementation of initiatives. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in 2018 was fully centrally sponsored for Union Territories without a legislature. The fund's sharing ratio is 60:40 for all other States and Union Territories with Legislature (Gupta, 2019).

- As privatization is increasing these days leading to commercialization of Education, recently policy, NEP 2020 aims at curbing the commercialization of education in India (MHRD, 2020, p. 30) (Singh et al, 2023). Rising enrollment in pre - school classes, less under -age children going to Grade I, FLN notifications to all schools & widespread teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Weaknesses

- Implementation Challenges: Varying infrastructure and resources pose hurdles (Kumar & Kumari, 2021).

- Teacher Shortage: Rural areas face a scarcity of qualified teachers and still couldn't meet the proposed student teacher ratio of 40:1 according to

SSA and RMSA (Kumar & Kumari, 2021).

- Monitoring and Evaluation: Lack of proper mechanisms for tracking progress (Swargiary, & Roy, 2023).

- Digital Divide: Unequal digital infrastructure affects technology-based initiatives (Tikku & Kohli, 2020).

Opportunities

- Public-Private Partnerships: Encourages collaboration for resource leveraging (Gupta, 2019).

- Community Engagement: Promotes community participation for better education outcomes (Tikku & Kohli, 2020).

- International Cooperation: Facilitates learning from global best practices (Gupta, 2019).

Challenges

- Social and Cultural Barriers: Gender biases hinder inclusive education (Kaul & Gull, 2018). The dropout rates increase significantly as girls progress through the educational Levels, with the highest dropout occurring at the higher secondary level.

- Big changes in practice: However, survey data on daily student attendance rates remains unavailable. Substantial shifts in classroom practices are imperative, necessitating suitable activities and concerted efforts to ensure all children attain foundational literacy and numeracy skills (ASER, 2022).

- Inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and administrative capacity constraints (Gupta & Singh, 2020). There is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure the program's effectiveness and address any shortcomings or gaps in implementation (Tikku & Kohli, 2020).

- Dropout Rates: There is a noticeable decline in enrollment ratios at the upper primary level compared to the primary level. Dropout rates are particularly pronounced in the primary stage, affecting children aged 6 to 11 years (Dar, 2021).

Impact of SSA 2018 on Stakeholders

The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2018) program has significantly impacted various stakeholders, including students, teachers, and communities.

Impact on Students

- **Improved Access to Education: The SSA 2018 program has led to increased access to education for students, a significant emphasis placed on prioritizing special focus groups, such as girls, Dalit children (Scheduled Castes), children from Adivasi communities (Scheduled Tribes), minority groups (including Muslims), children with disabilities, and children of migratory laborers (Puri, 2021).**

- **Enhanced Learning Outcomes: Studies have shown that the program's focus on quality interventions, such as teacher training and curriculum reforms, has contributed to improved learning outcomes among students (Tikku & Kohli, 2020).**

Impact on Teachers

- Professional Development: SSA 2018 has facilitated teachers' professional development through various training programs and capacity-building initiatives, leading

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to improved teaching practices and pedagogical skills (Gupta & Singh, 2020).

- Teacher Shortage: Rural areas face a scarcity of qualified teachers and still couldn't meet the proposed student teacher ratio of 40:1 according to SSAand RMSA. (Kumar & Kumari, 2021).

Impact on Communities

- Community Engagement: The program has promoted community participation and engagement in education through initiatives like school management committees and parent-teacher associations, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility (Gupta & Singh, 2020).

- **Economic Development: By improving access to quality education, the program has the potential to drive economic development within communities by equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed for employment and entrepreneurship (Kumar & Kumari, 2021).**

Recommendations and Suggestions for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Samagra Shikshaabhiyan (SSA 2018)

- Resource allocation and utilization: adequate and timely allocation of funds, transparent and accountable utilization of resources.

- Capacity building and professional development: Invest in comprehensive CBPs – for teachers, administrators, and other personnel.

- Addressing socio-cultural barriers and promoting inclusivity, Providing parameters for
  Monitoring, evaluation, and course correction, Continuity and sustainability.

- Alignment with NEP 2020: Ensure that the SSA 2018 program is closely aligned with the objectives and priorities outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, particularly regarding foundational literacy and numeracy, vocational education, and holistic development.

- Flexible Implementation Guidelines: Provide states and Union territories with greater flexibility in designing and implementing the SSA 2018 program to accommodate local

context, needs, and priorities while maintaining alignment with national goals.

- Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms: SSA 2018 enhances monitoring through robust data collection, regular assessments, and accountability frameworks to track progress and ensure stakeholder accountability.

- Focus on Foundational Learning: Prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy skill development in the early years of schooling through targeted interventions, teacher training, and curriculum reforms.

- Quality Assurance Mechanisms: Strengthen quality assurance mechanisms, including teacher performance assessments, curriculum reviews, and standardized testing, to ensure that the SSA 2018 program delivers high-quality education outcomes.

- The absence of appropriate key indicators and the necessity to redefine the aims and objectives are evident, asthe program strives to address the educational requirements of all students, encompassing both elementary and secondary levels.

- Initiatives bridging the rural digital divide should be prioritized, encompassing the expansion of digital infrastructure, affordable access to devices and internet connectivity, and promoting digital literacy for rural students and teachers. Collaborations with private entities and leveraging government schemes could expedite this process.

- Addressing the imperative of girls' education encompasses using several key strategies. Firstly, it involves raising awareness regarding the significance of educating girls. Secondly, targeted interventions and support systems should be implemented to encourage girls to pursue and sustain their education. Financial assistance and incentives can play a vital role in incentivizing families to prioritize their daughters' education. Additionally, efforts should focus on improving access to educational facilities, particularly in remote and marginalized regions.

- Furthermore, it is crucial to challenge cultural and social norms

that perpetuate gender discrimination and devalue girls' education. Overall, addressing the high dropout rates among girls across various educational levels is essential for advancing gender equality, empowering women, and fostering inclusive and equitable development throughout India.

Conclusion

Launched in 2018, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) stands as a landmark endeavor by the Indian government to bolster access to quality education and foster inclusive development across the nation. Spanning a vast network of over 11.6 lakh schools, involving more than 15.6 crore students and 57 lakh teachers, this program engages diverse stakeholders within the education ecosystem to deliver quality, inclusive, and equitable learning opportunities for all citizens. To better align with the NEP 2020 recommendations, new interventions have been introduced, covering domains like preprimary education, foundational literacy, child tracking, direct benefit transfers, access to senior secondary level, quality assessment, equity, vocational education, ICT initiatives, and social audits. In 2023, India surpassed China in terms of

population. According to India's census data from 2011, the country has a population of 472 million children under the age of eighteen. Even if just 1% of this age group remains illiterate or uneducated, it equates to a loss of 4.72 million resources, or 472 lakhs, which could otherwise contribute to the nation's growth and development. Providing education to every child in India remains a national imperative, pivotal for the advancement of society and the nation as a whole. The SSA 2018 program affords states and Union Territories the flexibility to plan and prioritize interventions within the scheme's framework, enabling a contextualized approach. Additionally, it facilitates the recruitment of language teachers and adheres to revised programmatic and financial norms, thereby fostering a comprehensive strategy for educational development.

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