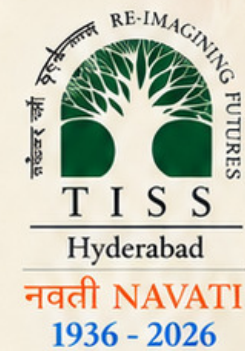


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QUALITY EDUCATION IN TELANGANA SCHOOLS

*Current Challenges and
Required Policy Responses*

Rekha Pappu

School of Educational Studies, TISS Hyderabad

Working Paper No. 01
2026

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Quality Education in Telangana Schools

Current Challenges and Required Policy Responses

Rekha Pappu^{*,**}

Abstract

The quality of school education in Telangana continues to remain a matter of concern even after a decade and more of the state's formation in 2014. This paper discusses the existing barriers and prospective enablers of quality school education in Telangana through the identification of five key drivers of quality: (i) governance and management; (ii) teacher education; (iii) school resources; (iv) teachers and teaching; and (v) student learning. The paper derives its understanding of quality primarily from the Right to Education Act (2009) and uses the same for its analysis of school education in Telangana.

The discussions and recommendations in the paper are also based on the recognition that quality in school education is determined by factors internal to the system as well as those external to it. The paper argues that while factors internal to schools, such as infrastructure, teachers and learning outcomes, have become hyper visible and are accorded extreme importance, external factors, such as the governance of school education and teacher education, are largely ignored, though their influence on the quality of school education is as much, if not more. The recommendations that the paper makes for achieving quality school education in Telangana are thus based on considerations of the ecosystem within which schools are located and of the need to adopt a holistic approach to addressing all aspects of the system in a cohesive manner.

Keywords: Quality education; education governance; student learning

1. Introduction

The aim of ensuring quality education for all 62,00,417 students enrolled in 42,123 schools (including primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary schools under various school manage-

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ments) located in the 33 districts of Telangana is a goal that is both critical and urgent.¹ The significance of the task too has not gone unrecognised. For instance, the Government of Telangana took cognisance of the poor performance of Telangana schools – as evidenced in the results of the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 – and of the declining standards in higher educational institutions (HEIs), and constituted the Telangana Education Commission (TEC) through a Government Order (GO) issued in September 2024. TEC was mandated through the GO to “advise on policy formulation and function as a think tank in the field of education for the Government of Telangana, taking due cognizance of the evolving and dynamic educational landscape.”²

TEC in turn invited educationists and practitioners to carefully study and suggest recommendations on various aspects of school education as part of its efforts to draft an education policy for Telangana. It formed nine working groups, one of which was commissioned in April 2025 specifically to examine issues of quality in school education. The present paper is a revised version of the submission made to TEC on behalf of the working group on quality in school education. Select discussion points and recommendations from the paper submitted to TEC have already been incorporated into the comprehensive report prepared by the Commission.³ The present version is thus a detailed and standalone paper focused only on issues of quality in school education in the state of Telangana, 12 years after its formation in 2014.

The consideration of quality in school education is an overarching one that encompasses all aspects of schools and their functioning. This paper, however, is limited to a discussion of the *key drivers of quality in school education*, which are identified as the following:

- governance and management;
- teacher education;
- school resources;
- teachers and teaching; and

¹ These figures are reported by the Telangana Education Commission (TEC) and are based on UDISE+ data extracted in November 2025. The level-wise and management-wise data can be found in Table 2.3 of Telangana Education Commission, *Education Policy for Telangana 2026: Vision for Inclusive Excellence* (Hyderabad: Telangana Education Commission, 2026, p.60).

² The GO Ms. No. 27, through which the Telangana Education Commission was constituted, can be found at <https://tec.telangana.gov.in/TEC/CircularAndGo?id=GO>.

³ A report covering all levels of education in the state of Telangana, titled *Education Policy for Telangana 2026: Vision for Inclusive Excellence*, was submitted by TEC to the Government of Telangana in January 2026. See Telangana Education Commission, *Education Policy for Telangana 2026*. The paper on quality in school education itself was submitted to TEC in November 2025. This submission to TEC, however, was not put out in the public domain.

- student learning.

The discussions and recommendations are based on the recognition that quality in school education is propelled by factors internal to the system as well as those that are external. It is reasoned that while factors internal to the school, such as infrastructure, teachers and learning outcomes, have become hyper visible and are accorded excessive importance, external factors, such as governance and management as well as teacher education, influence the quality of school education as much, if not more. It is for this reason that the two themes of governance and management, and teacher education, are discussed ahead of the other themes since it is contended that these aspects shape and impact the delivery of education within schools in crucial ways.

The paper begins with a brief note on how quality is presently conceptualised within the policy discourse on school education in India. It thereafter clarifies how the term is deployed in the paper when assessing the prevailing situation, and subsequently goes on to make recommendations for ensuring quality school education. The paper primarily draws on the understanding of quality embedded in the Right to Education Act (2009). In keeping with the original requirement of making recommendations to TEC on the subject of quality in school education, each section includes a set of recommendations drawn from the discussion of existing barriers and prospective enablers vis-à-vis each of the core drivers of quality that have been identified. These same recommendations are then consolidated in the final section of the paper.

The section that follows covers the broad spectrum of understanding that is available in the country vis-à-vis conceptions of quality in school education, before zooming in on discussions pertaining in particular to the quality of school education in Telangana.

2. Conceptions of Quality in Education

In the past few decades, quality has emerged as a recurrent term and theme in discussions about school education in ways that suggest that it can be both measured and also scientifically and systematically managed. This usage of the term is akin to its understanding on factory floors or in industrial production where *replicability* and *mass production* are a necessity and, accordingly, strict control is maintained in relation to the features of the physical goods that are produced. In a departure from the understanding of quality in education as being concerned with what is worth teaching in relation to the philosophical and social aims of education, quality in education has

increasingly begun to be associated with standardisation vis-à-vis a set of metrics that focus particularly on learner outcomes that can be objectively measured.

The history of the quality debate in education reveals that there were multiple and contending conceptions of quality in education at the turn of the 21st century, including those of UNICEF, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).⁴ These conceptions of quality were, in some instances, elaborated by developing what are referred to as ‘quality frameworks’. The earliest of such frameworks in the Indian context, for instance, was developed by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2013 as the School Quality Assessment and Accreditation (SQAA) Framework. The Shaala Siddhi framework (also referred to as the School Standards and Evaluation Framework), developed by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in 2015, is also a school education quality framework; it is widely regarded as comprehensive, given its identification of, and in-depth focus on, seven domains within schools that contribute to the quality of education:

- i. school resources (infrastructure);
- ii. teaching, learning and assessment;
- iii. learners’ progress, attainment and development;
- iv. managing teacher performance and professional development;
- v. school leadership and management;
- vi. inclusion, health and safety; and
- vii. productive community participation.

The domains identified by the Shaala Siddhi framework are not weighted, and substantial improvements in *all* seven domains are regarded as essential for ensuring quality in school education. Unlike the Shaala Siddhi framework, other school quality frameworks that have been developed in the last couple of decades include weightages for the different domains, implying that those with greater weightages require greater attention because they are regarded as more important domains that

⁴ The special issue of the journal *Contemporary Education Dialogue* on “Quality in Education” (vol. 7, no. 1, 2010) includes a significant set of reflections and studies on quality in education within the Indian context at the turn of the 21st century.

therefore require prioritisation. The School Quality Assessment Framework (SQAF), which is the most recent of the quality frameworks and is used to evaluate schools under the PM SHRI scheme launched in 2022, also highlights issues of quality in a similar way, i.e., by setting up a hierarchy among the different domains.

A few years after the Shaala Siddhi framework of 2015 was developed, NITI Aayog introduced the School Education Quality Index (SEQI) in 2019, which became the basis for the Performance Grading Index (PGI) applied to Indian states for assessing the quality of their school education. At present, the annual PGI report is accepted throughout the country as providing the official information on the status and quality of school education in each state. The PGI report includes metrics that are focused on six domains:

- i. learning outcomes;
- ii. access;
- iii. infrastructure and facilities;
- iv. equity;
- v. governance processes; and
- vi. teacher education and training.

In the present context of addressing the subject of quality in school education, these frameworks endorsed by the central government, as well as national and international policy discourses, cannot be ignored and will be referenced in the discussions that follow. However, it bears emphasising that this position paper on quality in school education is aligned with the objectives of the Right to Education Act (2009), especially because of its emphasis on equity and justice in and through education.

The approach of this paper is informed by the view that education, especially school education, is a public good; that there are varied but legitimate stakeholders (students, teachers, school leaders, parents, education professionals, the state, civil society organisations, etc.) with interests in all aspects of school education; and that consensus among these different stakeholders about what constitutes quality in education is important. Such a view can be read in the various sections and clauses of the Right to Education Act, including, for instance, in the mandatory requirement of setting up

School Management Committees (SMCs) with the various powers and responsibilities given to these SMCs. A related understanding on which this paper is based is that teachers and educational functionaries are central agents in ensuring last-mile delivery, and therefore their voices and capacities cannot be ignored. The paper also recognises that education systems are made up of sectoral silos in terms of levels (elementary, secondary, higher secondary), school boards and managements, and regulating institutions, which tend to be hierarchically administered. Regular interaction and collaboration across these borders and sectors are deemed essential.

Furthermore, the paper endorses the view that schools can and must enhance capabilities and improve the life chances of students by giving them a well-rounded education. Schools hold the potential to work towards establishing equity in society and must leverage this capacity. The paper thus bears in mind the wide-ranging and positive implications that follow from the provisioning of quality school education. It discusses the question of quality in school education by focusing on the following areas of the school education system:

- governance and management of school education;
- teacher education;
- school resources;
- teachers and teaching; and
- student learning.

Of the various domains proposed by other frameworks, these five in particular have been chosen not only because they shape school education in crucial ways but also because they do so only by maintaining a very symbiotic relationship with each other. The argument is not that the domains selected by the other frameworks, which are not included here, are of lesser importance. Rather, the selection is guided by the consideration that a focus on the five domains listed above can help adequately capture significant issues in relation to the quality of school education in Telangana.

3. Governance and Management of School Education

The function of good governance in an education system is to guarantee quality education for all through equitable resource allocation and by fostering the development of relevant skills and competencies where required. Good governance is also about ensuring the implementation and delivery

of quality education at the last mile. Multi-level governance characterises almost all education systems today, involving the need for close coordination and cooperation among multiple individuals holding different, but linked, responsibilities within the system. Effective governance thus involves aligning the efforts of the multiple stakeholders involved in educational decision-making and implementation.⁵ Quite clearly, therefore, good governance is of paramount importance for ensuring good-quality school education.

Governance is included as one of the six domains in the School Education Quality Index (SEQI) and, through 15 indicators, is assigned a maximum score of 130 in the PGI reports published by the Government of India through the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL). As explained in the report itself, only those governance processes that use information technology (IT) are considered for the purpose of preparing the PGI report. As a result, governance that is dependent on human interface is not included when assessing performance in the process of arriving at the PGI. Under the head “governance”, the PGI thus has the limited function of capturing details such as the digital attendance of students and teachers, the digital transfer of funds and the time taken by the state government to release funds. Even on the basis of this limited set of indicators, Telangana’s score is quite low. The score for education governance came down from an earlier low of 58.1 in the PGI report of 2022–23 to a further low of 44.7 in 2023–24.⁶ While it is important to improve this score, it is equally pertinent that issues and gaps in educational governance in Telangana that go beyond what the PGI report captures be addressed and resolved on a priority basis.

Significant among the governance challenges that Telangana faces with regard to school education are the weak monitoring and support processes available to schools due to large-scale vacancies in crucial governance and administrative positions. For instance, 596 out of 613 mandals do not have education officers. As a result, supervision and support for schools have suffered. Vacancies also exist in key administrative and teaching positions: 270 out of 286 DIET faculty positions are vacant.⁷

⁵ Tracey Burns and Florian Köster, eds., *Governing Education in a Complex World*, Educational Research and Innovation (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016).

⁶ The reports of the Performance Grading Index, published by the Department of School Education and Literacy, can be accessed at <https://pgi.udiseplus.gov.in/>. See, for instance, Department of School Education and Literacy, *Performance Grading Index for Districts of India (PGI-D): Combined Report for 2022–23 and 2023–24* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2025).

⁷ In the absence of timely and relevant statistics being placed in the public domain by the state government, this paper has relied on information included in an article published in April 2025 by G. Ram Mohan in *The Wire*: G. Ram Mohan, “With Slight Uptick in Education Budget, Will Telangana’s Schooling Sector See an Improvement?” *The Wire*, 8 April 2025, <https://thewire.in/education/with-slight-uptick-in-education-budget-will-telanganas-schooling-sector-see-an-improvement>. A news item published closer to the time of finalisation of this paper mentions that 613 out of 633 mandals do not have education officers. In other words, according to the news item, only 20 mandals have full-time education officers working in the designated administrative positions. See Manvi Vyas,

Similarly, there are a significant number of vacancies in the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), the District Education Offices (DEOs), the Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE) and the Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs). Delays in recruitment and long-pending legal cases have hampered the possibility of filling up vacancies and providing the necessary support for the education system.

In the face of large-scale vacancies, institutions have resorted to hiring contractual and ad hoc faculty, a move that is accompanied by its own set of uncertainties and problems. Moreover, the absence of full-time administrative officers and faculty for education has led to the setting up of parallel structures involving a larger role for non-state players without the requisite knowledge and experience with regard to educational matters.

The fact that education is a complex and specialised field requiring a comprehensive understanding of its many and interrelated aspects is overlooked, and education is instead treated on a par with other systems where the relationship between input and output is direct and straightforward. This form and manner of governance have resulted in undermining the professional identities of educators (including school teachers and faculty of teacher education institutes) as well as of education officers of the state. Ironically, the present governance processes are marked by a strong distrust of educators and education officers of the government and a greater reliance on non-state actors. Accountability requirements for teachers and education officers at the block and district levels are overemphasised, while their autonomy in decision-making based on local conditions is almost completely withdrawn. However, it has been pointed out that nowhere in the world have education systems benefitted from undermining educational expertise in favour of managerial efficiency alone.⁸ A skewed balance between accountability and autonomy that prioritises the former, i.e., accountability, has also been found to be counterproductive.

In terms of governance and management at the school level, the importance of fostering strong, visionary and reliable leadership cannot be overstated. The setting up within SCERT of the School Leadership Academy (SLA) as an extended arm of the National Institute of Educational Planning

“Proposed Rationalisation Exercise Will Leave 8,769 Gram Panchayats in Telangana without a Single Govt School, Caution Experts in Open Letter to CM Revanth Reddy”, *Times of India*, 8 July 2026, <https://timesofindia.india.com/city/hyderabad/proposed-rationalisation-exercise-will-leave-8769-gram-panchayats-in-telangana-without-a-single-govt-school-caution-experts-in-open-letter-to-cm-revanth-reddy/articleshow/132246189.cms>. The discrepancy in the total number of mandals in the two news reports of 2025 and 2026, respectively, is likely due to administrative changes brought in by the government. Information included in Mohan’s article is cited in the present paper since these figures have been widely cited by others as well and have not been disputed.

⁸ S. A. Reddy, “Telangana Education Commission 2025: A Critical Review”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 60, no. 29 (19 July 2025): 28–31.

and Administration (NIEPA) was thus a significant development in 2018. The activities of the SLA ought to be further extended to benefit school leadership in an ongoing manner, since it has been noted that the functional autonomy of schools under good leadership goes a long way towards ensuring quality education.⁹

Together with reviewing the ongoing governance practices in connection with school education, there is a need to bring clarity to the governance, on the one hand, of early childhood care and education (ECCE), where the health, care and nutrition of children are prioritised, and, on the other, of the emerging focus on early childhood education (ECE), which emphasises foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) or learning. The requirements of care and education, however, are placed separately under the purview of two different departments – the Department of Women Development and Child Welfare and the Department of School Education – with limited clarity on areas of overlap. For instance, a policy-level consensus has been established about ECE being integrated with school education as the foundational stage, but the administrative and governance mechanisms through which this can be achieved need to be thought through and put in place. These include the introduction of ECE teacher education programmes, the setting up of teacher education institutes for ECE and the introduction of a designated cadre of ECE teachers whose recruitment, training and career pathways are clearly laid out.

Governance and management issues thus need careful attention and articulation in a Telangana State Policy on School Education, which should be developed based on wide-ranging consultations with the various stakeholders. Prior to such a move, it is also important that data related to education be made available to the public so that there can be an informed discussion on matters of quality in school education. The absence in the public domain of official data on a range of issues (beyond what is covered by UDISE+) has been a major challenge when seeking to assess and respond to education governance in the state.

Recommendations

- Present gaps in the functioning of SCERT, DIETs, CTEs and IASE should be examined, and the large-scale vacancies should be filled up.
- Key education statistics of the state must be placed in the public domain to facilitate understanding and discussion about school education. Such statistics are also essential for ensuring

⁹ Burns and Köster, *Governing Education*.

greater transparency and informed discussion among the various stakeholders.

- Leadership in all schools should be made aware of the different dimensions of quality education and supported to ensure that their schools meet the requirements of quality education.
- A comprehensive policy for integrating early childhood education (ECE) with school education must be developed. Such a policy must begin with a clarification of whether the responsibility for all aspects of foundational stage education (including the recruitment of ECE teachers and related matters) lies with the Department of School Education or with the Women and Child Welfare Department.

4. Teacher Education

It is a well-established fact today that teacher education determines the quality of school education. Teacher education is entrusted with the responsibility of building a strong cadre of school teachers with an understanding of all aspects of the teaching profession, including child development, relevant content knowledge and pedagogical skills, as well as critical and reflective practice. Since schools draw on the pool of graduates from teacher education institutes (TEIs), the quality of education in schools is in fact a reflection of the quality of teacher education.

Telangana has 371 TEIs, including universities, stand-alone colleges and 10 District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). Through these institutes, about 750 pre-service teacher education (PSTE) programmes are offered. The break-up of the number of private and government institutes offering the D.El.Ed. and of government TEIs offering the B.Ed. is as follows:¹⁰

S. No.	Name of the Institution	Programme	No. of institutions	Intake	Admissions (2024–25)
1	Government DIETs	D.El.Ed.	10	1,400	946
2	Private TEIs		62	3,300	2,843
3	Government Colleges of Teacher Education	B.Ed.	3	300	265
4	Government Institute of Advanced Studies in Education		1	100	86

The quality of teacher education institutes is considered to be very low throughout the country, and Telangana State is no exception in this regard. The bulk of the TEIs in Telangana, as in the country

¹⁰ Presentation made by the Director, SCERT, Telangana, at the *Teacher Education Consultation Workshop* organised by the Telangana Education Commission, 25 April 2025.

as a whole, are in the private sector. Concerns have been expressed about the functioning and regulation of these TEIs in the private sector. The findings of a recent study, which sought to assess whether there was any difference between the quality of government TEIs and that of private TEIs, further emphasise the need for the regulation and monitoring of teacher education institutions.¹¹ The study analysed data from the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) in one state, using performance on the test as a proxy for the quality of pre-service teacher education for both D.El.Ed. and B.Ed. programmes. Three findings from the study are significant in the context of the discussion on PSTE: first, although private self-financed institutions dominate the teacher education landscape, a much larger proportion of students from publicly funded institutions qualify in the TET; second, teachers emerging from publicly funded institutions perform better on the TET, overall and across all social groups; and third, from the point of view of the number of candidates appearing for the TET as an indicator of institutional efficiency, the publicly funded TEIs are better than the private TEIs.

The study's finding that a very large proportion of private institutions are underperforming compared to the DIETs (offering the D.El.Ed. programme) and the CTEs, IASEs and university departments (offering the B.Ed.) is significant. That these publicly funded institutions are relatively successful from the point of view of quality, equity and efficiency serves to establish their value and, therefore, the need to support them. This finding is especially important in the context of DIETs, where there is an increasing push for them to focus only on in-service teacher education, leaving PSTE to the private sector.

With regard to PSTE, another issue of pressing importance is connected with the introduction by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) of its Regulations 2025 for Recognition, Norms and Procedures, which have been passed by the NCTE's General Body but are still under review by the government. Of particular concern in the new regulations is the emphasis on the hyper-specialisation of PSTE programmes, both with regard to the stage at which student-teachers will teach in the future and the subject that they will teach. Separate curricula are advocated for each subject at each of the four stages: Foundational, Preparatory, Middle and Secondary. Institutions are to receive recognition according to the stage of teacher education they offer. Moreover, according to the proposed Regulations 2025, TEIs are to follow the curriculum prescribed by the

¹¹ Padma M. Sarangapani et al., "Quality and Equity in Preservice Teacher Education in India: Analysis of Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) Data from One State", *International Journal of Educational Development* 119 (2025): 103417, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103417>.

NCTE. Only 30% adaptation of the prescribed curriculum by universities is allowed under the proposed policy, with the implication that the knowledge base and autonomy of universities are being severely undermined. A careful engagement with these aspects is extremely critical from the point of view of delivering quality school education.

Given the growing recognition of the importance of ECE and of the need for its integration with school education, a qualification framework along with a PSTE programme for the nursery and pre-primary stage needs to be established. At present, teacher training for the nursery or pre-primary stage is mainly provided by privately funded institutions. The ECE component in the D.El.Ed. programme is also minimal at present, thereby necessitating the development and introduction of a PSTE programme for the critical stage of ECE.

In-service teacher education (INSTE), or continuous professional development (CPD), for teachers also has a very important role to play in meeting the highest quality indicators of school education. At present, while INSTE is being offered by SCERT for government schools, there are also several concerns. The vacancies in DIETs and SCERT noted earlier have negative implications for sustained and systematic INSTE: there is no fixed training calendar, and training is offered in a sporadic and ad hoc manner. Moreover, the absence of academic monitoring has resulted in a limited understanding of where INSTE is necessary.

Recommendations

- Recognise the importance of enhanced support and funding for government TEIs offering pre-service teacher education programmes, to ensure quality in the crucial sector of teacher education.
- Regulate the functioning of private TEIs in the state to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education.
- The Telangana state government's stand vis-à-vis the draft NCTE Regulations 2025 needs immediate review and clarification.
- Teacher education programmes or training programmes for early childhood education that are standardised and recognised need to be introduced, along with programmes for the continuous professional development of ECE teachers.

5. School Resources

The use of the term “school resources” as against “infrastructure” is intended to foreground the active role that each resource plays in school education. The term “resources” conveys that the items and structures referred to are not inert but contribute in significant ways to students’ experiences of well-being and learning. They are to be viewed not just as functional elements of schools but as essential features that enable children’s dignity, rights and safety.¹²

The availability, adequacy and usability of school resources are of utmost significance. However, concerns about resources in the schools of Telangana have often been highlighted in media reports, especially with regard to the absence or non-functioning of toilets, drinking water facilities, libraries and computer labs. In fact, while justifying the decision to establish the Young India Residential Schools in Telangana, Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, in his budget speech, admitted to the poor state of infrastructure in government schools. He has been quoted in an article published in *The Wire* as saying, “Currently, there are 1,023 government gurukul (residential) schools in Telangana, out of which 662 schools do not have their own buildings. Many gurukuls are operating in buildings with minimal facilities, lacking proper toilet amenities, and housing hundreds of students. Although there are special residential schools for different categories, there is no uniformity in terms of educational standards and basic infrastructure among them. While the global education system has undergone significant transformation, our government schools continue to lag behind by decades.”¹³

The report of the Performance Grading Index 2.0 confirms the assessment of the Minister. The PGI report released in 2025 indicates that while there was a remarkable improvement in Telangana in 2023–24 compared to 2022–23 as far as infrastructure and facilities are concerned, the state lags behind other states and, with a score of 74.7, is still far from attaining the maximum score of 190. (The indicators used by the PGI to assess ‘infrastructure and facilities’ do not map entirely onto those listed by *Shaala Siddhi*, but it is in fact the latter that gives a broad sense of the status of infrastructural facilities in schools.) Focused drives to improve school infrastructure through schemes and programmes have indeed been taken up in the state, but they are largely limited to the

¹² Among the more important school resources, the *Shaala Siddhi (School Standards and Evaluation)* Framework developed by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration lists the following: school premises; classrooms and other rooms; classroom furniture (desks and benches, blackboards); electricity and gadgets; library; laboratory; computers/computer lab; ramp; mid-day meal, kitchen and utensils; drinking water; hand-wash facilities; toilets; playground with sports equipment and materials; and ICT facilities.

¹³ Mohan, “With Slight Uptick in Education Budget”.

physical and aesthetic aspects of schools, which, though significant, do not involve a comprehensive package to improve school *resources*.

State-of-the-art facilities are conceived as an integral part of the proposed Telangana Young Integrated Residential Schools, the launch of which was announced by the state government in 2025.¹⁴ Similarly, a proposal for transforming select high schools into Telangana Public Schools covering nursery to Grade 12, with a student strength of 1,500–1,800, has also received support from the government. High-quality infrastructure is envisioned as a necessary part of such schools, as also of the Telangana Foundational Schools, which are to provide schooling from pre-primary to Grade 2. The emphasis on quality infrastructure for these new categories of schools is welcome, but there is as much need to ensure that the gap between resource-rich and resource-scarce schools does not widen with the creation of these new categories of schools.

One aspect of the proposed model of the Telangana Public Schools that stands out as an important indicator of quality is the emphasis on having a sizeable strength of students in the school. Increased student strength leads to the optimisation of resources and has a beneficial and cascading effect in terms of increased motivation for teachers as well as greater accountability of all involved in the school system. Unfortunately, though, the strength of student enrolments in government schools has been a matter of concern over the last few decades.

Trends in student enrolment tracked over a decade through UDISE+ data between 2014 and 2025 reveal that the share of student enrolment in private schools has been steadily increasing, moving upward from 52.08% in 2014–15 to 60.57% in 2024–25. Student enrolment in Grade 1, too, has been increasing year on year in private schools, while it has been decreasing in government schools. The percentage share of private schools in Grade 1 enrolments increased from 57.19% in 2014–15 to 73.50% in 2024–25. In parallel, the percentage share of government schools in Grade 1 enrolments decreased from 42.81% in 2014–15 to 26.50% in 2024–25. One reason that stands out among the explanations provided for the reduced enrolments is connected with the poor resources of government schools. Parents have often spoken of concerns about their child's safety in government schools and of their child not being valued enough. The lack of proper chairs, benches, toilets, etc. seems to mock the aspirations of parents who believe that school education will ensure a better future for their child. On the other hand, private schools that have adequate resources charge fees that stretch the finances of families.

¹⁴ Mohan, “With Slight Uptick in Education Budget”.

Recommendations

- Every child has the right to usable and adequate school resources. These should be provided in all schools instead of creating separate sets of resource-rich schools.
- Ensure a sizeable student strength in every school.

6. Teachers and Teaching

The centrality of teachers in an education system cannot be denied. This critical role played by teachers is aptly captured in the title of UNESCO's State of the Education Report for India 2021, which is *No Teacher, No Class*.¹⁵ The importance of the teacher's role is often confused with her being the only person responsible for the performance of students and of the school itself. This is far from the case; as has been pointed out in the earlier sections, a teacher is able to carry out her responsibilities effectively when provided with an environment conducive to the teaching and learning processes taking place in schools.

The total strength of teachers across government and private schools in Telangana State is 3,41,000. Of these, 48,900 teachers are deployed at the foundational and preparatory levels, 54,740 teachers at the middle school level and 2,38,000 teachers at the secondary level. Of all teachers, 43.48% are working in government schools, 55.48% in private schools, 0.97% in aided schools and 0.07% in schools that have other management structures.¹⁶

The teacher–pupil ratios of 1:10 at the foundational level, 1:11 at the preparatory level, 1:12 at the middle level and 1:13 at the secondary level in government schools indicate low student enrolments. Data from UDISE+ 2023 further reveal a skewed picture in terms of teacher deployment: 2,000 teachers are assigned to the 2,097 zero-enrolment schools in the state, while 5,985 schools have only a single teacher. Most of the single-teacher schools are in rural and remote locations. Reports also reveal that nearly 15,000 teaching positions are vacant in the state.

A matter of concern with regard to the work allocated to teachers is the growing number of non-teaching responsibilities given to them. The nature and scope of these non-teaching responsibil-

¹⁵ Padma M. Sarangapani et al., *No Teacher, No Class: State of the Education Report for India 2021* (New Delhi: UNESCO, 2021).

¹⁶ The figures given in this paragraph as well as the next are drawn from the presentation made by the Director, SCERT, Telangana, at the *Teacher Education Consultation Workshop* organised by the Telangana Education Commission on 25 April 2025. This source is the closest in terms of accessing the most recent and official data. See also note 7 on the non-availability of relevant statistics in the public domain.

ities, as also teachers' concerns in relation to them, have been brought out in detail in the report titled "Beyond the Classroom: Government Teachers' Views on the Poor Learning Outcomes of Children in Telangana". This report was brought out through a collaborative study involving Samagra Shiksha, Telangana, the University of Hyderabad and UNICEF. Based on the survey as well as focus group discussions with teachers, the study team reported that teachers "overwhelmingly reported that an excessive burden of administrative tasks significantly hinders their ability to focus on instruction. They noted that activities such as taking attendance, filling out forms, entering online data and managing registers occupy more than half of their workday. Almost all participants identified non-teaching work as the most critical issue affecting learning outcomes."¹⁷

This trend of entrusting non-teaching duties to teachers goes against the Right to Education Act (2009), which clearly lays down that teachers should not be given non-academic work, except in specific instances such as collecting census data, providing relief work during natural disasters or helping with the conduct of elections, so that they can concentrate on their primary responsibility of teaching. However, in the name of efficiency and compliance, teachers are burdened with many administrative tasks, including maintaining school records of different kinds, collecting data for Management Information System (MIS) reports, complying with instructions received from higher-ups in the state, managing mid-day meals, overseeing various schemes and involving themselves in initiatives periodically introduced by the state or by corporate social responsibility or civil society organisations. The administrative and other non-teaching responsibilities leave little time for teachers to focus on their core pedagogical role, which involves preparing lesson plans, preparing for class teaching, designing assessments for students, developing teaching-learning materials, attending training sessions and attending to the curricular and co-curricular needs of children.

Notwithstanding the work that teachers carry out, a negative image of government school teachers has become entrenched in the imagination of the public and of policymakers. In the various narratives that circulate in the media and in other official as well as unofficial reports, government school teachers are held responsible for the failure of the publicly funded schooling system. It is contended that, in spite of receiving a good salary, teachers are inept, insensitive and indifferent to the work that they have to carry out. Teachers are blamed for the poor learning outcomes of students and for the failure of government schools. However, such a narrative is misleading, since it does not take into account the structural failure involving deficient governance and management, result-

¹⁷ Samagra Shiksha Telangana, University of Hyderabad and UNICEF, "Beyond the Classroom: Government Teachers' Views on the Poor Learning Outcomes of Children in Telangana" (unpublished study report, 2025), 43.

ing in chronic understaffing, the absence of support networks for teachers and inadequate school resources. Additionally, since teachers have to cede to the judgement of the bureaucracy as well as of various corporate/non-state actors on matters of educational importance, their professional identity, based on their own training and teaching experience, is further compromised. Rigid insistence on following the curricula and micromanagement of their work often devalue and demotivate teachers. Furthermore, career pathways for teachers are rather flat, with very few opportunities for them to move up in the system. Support in terms of continuous professional development is also lacking.

An issue of emerging importance concerns teachers for the ECE or FLN stage. At present, teacher training for the foundational stage of schooling is mainly provided by privately funded institutions, and a striking feature of this training is the wide variety that prevails. Therefore, in order to ensure quality ECE, the government needs to take the lead and set up institutions to develop a designated cadre of teachers for ECE. This involves developing a qualification framework, introducing standardised ECE teacher education programmes and setting up teacher education institutes for the purpose. Programmes for the continuous professional development of ECE teachers need to be developed as well. Additionally, the career pathways of the ECE teacher cadre also need to be clearly envisaged and established.

Recommendations

- A shift from surveillance of teachers to support, recognising that professional growth comes from trust, dialogue and collaboration.
- More state support for teacher education programmes is necessary, a point made in the section on teacher education as well.
- The professional identity of teachers must be reinforced. Structures of supervision and professional development that nurture and value the professional autonomy of teachers must be created.
- Career pathways for teachers must be built so that there are more opportunities for teachers to move up in the system and remain motivated to make a mark in the education sector.

7. Student Learning

The prime reason for the existence of schools is to enable student learning in accordance with the objectives of the education system. There is almost no disagreement on this point. However, there are varying views on what constitutes student learning. Most quality frameworks, including the PGI report, equate learning with learner outcomes or learner attainment. Both learner outcomes and learner attainments are understood as specific and measurable. Learner outcomes are expected to specify what a student knows and will be able to do after completing a course. However, the learning outcomes that are defined are mostly limited to scholastic attainments and are based on tests. A strong critique of the outcome-based approach that is being promoted in Telangana has emerged. In an elaborate response to an earlier report on school education submitted by TEC, the educationist Adama Srinivas Reddy pointed out that

standardisation, while intended to ensure consistency, often flattens the diverse needs of schools, particularly in a state as socio-economically varied as Telangana. Similarly, the emphasis on learning outcomes-based regulation, though framed as student-centric, risks narrowing educational goals to test scores, sidelining holistic development, such as critical thinking or socio-emotional skills. The proposed biannual third-party assessments further entrench this focus, as schools may put emphasis on test preparation over meaningful learning to meet external benchmarks. Internationally, scholars like Stephen Ball ... have critiqued such audit cultures for fostering performative accountability, where schools “teach to the test” to satisfy regulators, often at the expense of authentic education.¹⁸

The conception of ‘student learning’ stands in contrast to the notion of student outcomes. Student learning is understood as a dynamic concept that refers both to the processes involved and to the broader educational goals that are envisaged by the school education system. Understood in this manner, student learning depends, at the immediate level, on the school environment and the teaching that takes place within the school and, at a more general level, on the education ecosystem itself.

Beyond the metrics of scholastic attainments and student outcomes, issues of equity and inclusion are pertinent to students’ experiences of schooling. The need for curriculum and pedagogy to connect with students’ language, culture and environment has been emphasised by earlier studies as

¹⁸ Reddy, “Telangana Education Commission 2025”, 30.

well as policy documents. The implementation of this aspect is crucial for enabling student learning. The bilingual textbooks introduced by the Telangana government are a significant effort at making some of these connections and facilitating student learning. The challenges and opportunities that emerged for teachers and students from the introduction of these textbooks need to be understood and followed up so that, even as students become bilingually proficient, their ability to think is strengthened through the language resources made available to them.

In thinking of student learning for the 21st century, it is important to recognise that divergent thinking among students needs to be accepted and encouraged instead of emphasising outcomes from standardised tests. In fact, the continued emphasis on performing well in standardised tests has led to the widespread acceptance of shadow education or coaching in the country. The introduction of the *Guidelines for Regulation of Coaching Centres* by the Government of India in January 2024 has served to further entrench this acceptance by legalising coaching centres. Such recognition of shadow education makes a mockery of the schooling system, as also of the discussion about learning outcomes as a marker of quality education in schools.¹⁹ The financial burden of providing coaching for children from the pre-primary stage upwards has not been comprehensively estimated for individual households of school-going children in Telangana, but is likely to be very high. Therefore, when thinking of quality in school education, there is a need to improve student learning through schools, on the one hand, and to render tuitions and coaching centres redundant, on the other.

Another aspect that is highly relevant when thinking of student learning is the well-being of all students, as also the support that is provided for children with special needs. A small-scale study conducted in Telangana State found that inclusive education and therapeutic provision were not easily accessible to students, especially in rural areas, and need to be developed much more.²⁰ The study also found that while there was willingness among teachers to support children with special needs and disabilities, they did not have adequate training and professional development to do so. The recommendations from the study thus foreground the need for establishing easy therapeutic access for children with special needs and for high-quality teacher training to enable the learning of students with disabilities and special needs.

¹⁹ P. Sharma, "Hitting the Target but Missing the Point: National Education Policy and the Shadow Education Industry in India", *Jindal Journal of Public Policy* 8, no. 2 (2025).

²⁰ Richard Rose et al., "A Comparison of Provision and Access to Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in a Metropolitan City and a Rural District in Telangana State, India", *Education Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2021): 111, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11030111>.

Recommendations

- Efforts to gauge student learning must go beyond the metrics of student outcomes and focus on processual experiences as well as the overall well-being of students, which is the essential prerequisite for student learning.
- Curriculum and pedagogy must connect and engage with students' language and culture and use them as resources to aid learning.
- Divergent thinking, which is an essential 21st-century skill, must be encouraged among students instead of emphasising standardised responses to standardised tests.
- Shadow education through tuitions and coaching should be rendered redundant by improving the quality of school education.
- The learning of students with special needs has to be ensured by making therapeutic provisioning accessible to them and by providing high-quality training in inclusive education to all teachers.

8. Conclusion

The developments in education in the last few years have been fast-paced and momentous. On the one hand, COVID-19 has laid bare the challenges that the school education system faces and, on the other, the introduction of the National Education Policy 2020 has presented a certain vision of education with which the state government needs to engage. Given this scenario, Telangana needs to recognise the nature of the existing problems and address them proactively. The present paper has sought to provide inputs towards this end on the subject of quality in school education.

The paper has drawn attention to some select aspects of the quality of school education through a focus on five factors that were identified and found to be relevant: (i) governance and management; (ii) teacher education; (iii) school resources; (iv) teachers and teaching; and (v) student learning. Based on the discussion in relation to each of these areas, certain recommendations were suggested. By way of conclusion, the recommendations from each section are compiled and consolidated as follows:

- (i) With regard to the governance and management of school education, the primary task should be to examine the present gaps in the functioning of SCERT, DIETs,

CTEs and IASE and to fast-track the process of filling up the large-scale vacancies in these institutions. Relatedly, key education statistics of the state must be placed in the public domain to facilitate understanding and discussion about school education. Leadership in all schools must be made aware of the different dimensions of governance and management and should be supported to ensure that their schools meet the requirements of quality education. As part of the governance and management of education, a comprehensive policy needs to be developed for integrating early childhood education (ECE) with school education, beginning with a clarification of whether the responsibility for foundational stage education lies with the Department of School Education or with the Women and Child Welfare Department.

(ii) The primary importance of ensuring quality in teacher education as a prerequisite for bringing quality to school education needs to be accepted. As such, the importance of enhanced support and funding for government Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) offering pre-service teacher education (PSTE) programmes, to ensure quality in the crucial sector of teacher education, should be recognised, and such support should be implemented. The functioning of private TEIs in the state should be regulated in order to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education. The state also needs to review and clarify its position vis-à-vis the draft NCTE Regulations 2025. Teacher education programmes or training programmes for early childhood education that are standardised and recognised need to be introduced, along with programmes for the continuous professional development of ECE teachers.

(iii) Every child has the right to usable and adequate school resources. These should be provided in all schools instead of creating separate sets of resource-rich schools. A sizeable student strength in every school should be ensured.

(iv) With regard to teachers, who form the backbone of the school education system, a shift should be made from surveillance of teachers to supporting them. A framework recognising that the professional growth of teachers comes from trust, dialogue and collaboration should be put in place. The professional identity of teachers must be reinforced. Accordingly, structures of supervision and professional development that nurture and value the professional autonomy of teachers should be created. Moreover, career pathways must be built for teachers so that there are more opportunities for them to move up in the system and remain motivated to make a mark in the education sector.

(v) Efforts to gauge student learning must go beyond the metrics of student outcomes and focus on processual experiences as well as the overall well-being of students, which is the essential prerequisite for student learning. Curriculum and pedagogy must connect and engage with students' language and culture and use them as resources to aid learning. Divergent thinking, which is an essential 21st-century skill, must be encour-

aged among students instead of emphasising standardised responses to standardised tests. Shadow education through tuitions and coaching should be rendered redundant by improving the quality of school education. The learning of students with special needs has to be ensured by making therapeutic provisioning accessible to them and by providing high-quality training in inclusive education to all teachers.

A focus on the five key drivers and their connected requirements as outlined in this paper can go a long way in ensuring that quality school education as a right of every child becomes a reality in Telangana State.

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