
EDUCATION QUALITY AND FUNDING IN CHENNAI: CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATES VS. POLITICAL WILL

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ABSTRACT

Education is a key driver of individual and national development, fostering economic growth and strengthening democracy. The Indian Constitution recognizes this by making education a fundamental right through Article 21A, introduced in the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002, which mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. Additionally, the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) emphasize the state's responsibility to promote education, especially for marginalized communities.

Despite these constitutional provisions, educational quality and funding in Chennai face several challenges. While the city has a high literacy rate and some of India's best schools, government institutions struggle with inadequate infrastructure, outdated teaching methods, and teacher shortages. In contrast, private schools provide better resources and modern facilities but remain inaccessible to lower-income families due to high fees.

One of the major barriers to improving public education is insufficient and inefficiently allocated government funding. While initiatives like the Right to Education (RTE) Act, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have increased school enrollment, they have not significantly improved learning outcomes. Additionally, political interference in teacher recruitment, bureaucratic delays, and limited digital resources further hinder progress.

To bridge the gap between constitutional mandates and political will, stronger public investment, enhanced teacher training, modernized curricula, and better governance are essential. Public-private partnerships and NGO support can also help. Ensuring equal and quality education for all is vital for empowering future generations and fostering a more equitable society.

Keywords: Indian Constitution, Article 21A, Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002, high literacy rate, Right to Education (RTE) Act, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.

Education quality and funding in Chennai: Constitutional Mandates vs. Political Will

Education is one of the most powerful tools for individual and national development. It shapes the minds of future generations, fosters economic growth, and strengthens democratic values. Recognizing its immense significance, the framers of the Indian Constitution incorporated provisions to ensure that education is a fundamental right and a priority for the state. The Indian Constitution not only highlights the role of education in empowering citizens but also mandates the government to take necessary steps for its promotion.

1. Education as a Fundamental Right

One of the most significant milestones in India's education system came with the introduction of Article 21A through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002¹. This article states that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. By making education a fundamental right, the Constitution ensures that no child is deprived of basic learning opportunities due to economic or social barriers.

Prior to this amendment, education was only a directive principle, meaning it was a desirable goal rather than a legally enforceable right. However, with the recognition of education as a fundamental right, the government is now obligated to ensure access to schooling for all children. This step has significantly contributed to improving literacy rates and increasing school enrollment across the country.

1.1 Directive Principles of State Policy and Education

In addition to making education a fundamental right, the Indian Constitution also emphasizes its importance in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). The DPSP, though not legally enforceable, provides guidelines for the government to create policies that enhance the well-being of its citizens. Several articles in this section specifically address education:

“Article 41: This article directs the state to make provisions for securing the right to education, along with work and public assistance, in cases of unemployment, old age, and disability.

¹ Milestones of Indian Education (1999–2024), *EducationWorld* (Nov.2024), <<https://www.educationworld.in/milestones-of-indian-education-1999-2024/>>

Article 45: Initially, this article required the state to provide free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 within ten years of the Constitution's commencement. Although this goal was not met within the specified timeframe, it laid the foundation for future policies that prioritized universal education.

Article 46: This article emphasizes the promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other weaker sections. It directs the government to ensure special care for these communities to help bridge historical inequalities.”

1.2 The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 was enacted to give effect to Article 21A of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. This law places a clear obligation on both the central and state governments to ensure that every child receives basic education without financial burden². One of the key features of the Act is that it ensures every child has access to a school within their neighborhood, eliminating the need for children to travel long distances. The Act also strictly prohibits any form of discrimination in the admission process and bans the collection of capitation fees, which often act as a barrier for economically weaker sections.

In addition to access and inclusion, the RTE Act sets out minimum standards for school infrastructure. This includes proper classrooms, safe drinking water, separate toilets for boys and girls, and adequate learning materials, all of which are essential for creating a safe and effective learning environment. Another important aspect of the Act is its focus on the quality of education. It makes it mandatory to appoint well-trained and qualified teachers and encourages continuous professional development. This is aimed at improving the overall learning experience for children and ensuring that they receive education of a reasonable standard.

By implementing the RTE Act, the government has taken significant steps to make education more accessible, particularly for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

² Vajiram & Ravi, Right to Education (RTE) Act, VAJIRAM & RAVI, <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/rte-act/>

1.3. The Role of Education in Strengthening Democracy

A well-educated population is essential for a successful democracy. Education fosters critical thinking, informed decision-making, and civic participation. It enables citizens to understand their rights and responsibilities, engage in discussions on governance, and vote wisely. The Indian Constitution recognizes that an educated society is the foundation of a strong democracy and, therefore, includes multiple provisions to promote education at all levels.

2. Challenges in Implementing Constitutional Provisions on Education

Despite the constitutional guarantees that ensure the right to education, several challenges persist in achieving universal and quality education across India. One of the primary issues is inadequate funding. While education is considered a priority, the government's budgetary constraints often hinder the development of essential infrastructure, the training of teachers, and the availability of necessary resources like textbooks, learning materials, and facilities. Another significant challenge is the high dropout rates, particularly in rural areas. Factors such as poverty, child labor, and social pressures, including early marriages, push many children out of school before they complete their education.

While access to education has improved over the years, the quality of education remains a pressing concern. Many students, despite attending school for several years, struggle with basic skills like literacy and numeracy. This highlights the issue of poor learning outcomes, which undermines the potential benefits of schooling. Furthermore, teacher shortages are a major obstacle in providing quality education³. A large number of government schools, especially in remote areas, lack trained and motivated teachers, which significantly affects the overall standard of education. Without proper guidance from skilled educators, students often fail to reach their full academic potential.

To fully realize the constitutional vision for education, these challenges must be addressed through better policy implementation, increased funding, and stronger accountability mechanisms.

2.1 Educational Quality and Funding in Chennai

³ Ministry of Education, India's Higher Education from Tradition to Transformation, Press Information Bureau (Feb. 13, 2025), <<https://pib.gov.in/FactsheetDetails.aspx?Id=149132®=3&lang=1>>

Education is the foundation of a progressive society, and Chennai, one of India's most developed metropolitan cities, has a strong educational system with numerous public and private institutions. However, despite its achievements, there remains a significant gap in education quality and funding. Government schools often struggle with inadequate resources, while private institutions offer better facilities but at a high cost. The disparity in funding leads to variations in learning outcomes, making quality education inaccessible to many underprivileged students. This article explores the state of education quality in Chennai, the challenges in funding, and possible solutions to improve the system.

3. The Current State of Education in Chennai

Chennai is home to some of India's best schools, colleges, and universities, with a literacy rate higher than the national average. The city has a mix of government-run schools, government-aided schools, and private institutions. While private schools offer modern facilities and high academic standards, government schools cater to a vast majority of lower-income students, often struggling with a lack of proper infrastructure, trained teachers, and quality learning materials.

3.1. Quality of Education in Government Schools

In Chennai, government schools offer education at little or no cost, making it possible for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to attend. Despite this, there are several challenges that hinder the quality of education in these schools. One significant issue is the lack of proper infrastructure. Many government schools are not equipped with basic facilities such as well-maintained classrooms, clean drinking water, or functioning toilets, which not only affects the comfort and safety of students but also leads to poor attendance rates. Another problem is the shortage of qualified teachers. In many schools, there aren't enough trained educators, which results in high student-teacher ratios and makes it difficult for teachers to give individual attention to students. Additionally, the teaching methods in these schools often rely heavily on rote memorization, which limits students' ability to think critically or explore their creativity. This outdated approach to learning fails to develop important problem-solving skills⁴. Finally, dropout rates are a significant concern. Many students are forced to leave school prematurely due to financial pressures at home, as they need to

⁴ Holmqvist, Mona. "Lack of Qualified Teachers: A Global Challenge for Future Knowledge Development." In *Teacher Education in the 21st Century*, IntechOpen, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.83417>.

contribute to family income. This disrupts their education and reduces opportunities for skill development and future employment.

3.2. Private Schools and Their Growing Influence

Private schools in Chennai offer better infrastructure, well-trained teachers, digital learning tools, and a structured curriculum. However, they come with high tuition fees, making them inaccessible to a large section of society. The growing preference for private schools highlights public dissatisfaction with the government education system. The competition for limited seats in reputed private institutions further intensifies the divide between privileged and underprivileged students.

4. Education Funding in Chennai

Funding is a crucial factor that determines the quality and accessibility of education. Chennai's education sector receives funding from both the state and central governments, private organizations, and NGOs. However, inefficient fund allocation, delays, and bureaucratic hurdles often prevent the money from being effectively utilized.

4.1. Government Funding for Public Schools

The Tamil Nadu government dedicates a substantial part of its budget to the education sector, prioritizing key areas like improving school infrastructure, ensuring fair compensation for teachers, and supporting midday meal programs. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to make education accessible and quality-focused. Initiatives such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education (RTE) Act further aim to enhance the facilities in public schools and provide free education to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that education is not a financial burden. However, despite these initiatives and the significant budget allocation, many government schools continue to struggle with funding shortages. These financial constraints often lead to challenges in maintaining school infrastructure, implementing digital learning programs, and offering extracurricular activities, which are essential for the holistic development of students.

4.2. Private and NGO Contributions

In Chennai, several NGOs and corporate organizations actively contribute to enhancing the education system through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These efforts

often involve funding the development and improvement of school infrastructure, providing scholarships to deserving students, and organizing teacher training programs to raise the quality of education. Notable NGOs such as Teach for India and AID India play a crucial role in addressing educational disparities by providing underprivileged students with access to quality education, which helps bridge the learning gap. While these efforts are commendable, they depend heavily on external funding, which is not a sustainable long-term solution. Given the limitations of CSR initiatives and the unpredictable nature of donations, it is essential that the government takes a more active role in ensuring consistent and adequate funding for education. Only through the government's increased responsibility and long-term investment can the education system become more stable and effective in meeting the needs of all students.

5. Challenges in Education Funding and Quality

In Chennai, there is a significant issue regarding the unequal distribution of funds across schools, especially between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Schools in urban regions tend to receive more financial support, which allows them to have better infrastructure, teaching materials, and overall educational resources. On the other hand, schools located in suburban and rural areas often face a shortage of funds, resulting in poorer quality of education and limited opportunities for students in these areas. This disparity in funding leads to an obvious gap in the educational experience and outcomes between different regions.

Additionally, bureaucratic delays in the allocation and distribution of government funds further exacerbate the situation. The funds, which are meant to support essential infrastructure improvements and academic development, often take a long time to reach the schools⁵. This delay hampers any immediate efforts to improve school conditions, leaving schools without the necessary resources to enhance the learning environment for students.

The influence of political factors also plays a critical role in the education sector. Changes in political leadership or shifts in governmental priorities can directly impact education policies and the allocation of funds. This creates instability, with education reforms and funding

⁵ Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), *Delay in Fund Flow in Social Sector*, in *The Budget Trails: Fiscal Governance Reforms at District Level for Improving Fund Flow and Utilisation in Development Schemes* (CBGA & Tata Trusts 2020), <https://www.cbga-india.org/study-report/budget-trails-fiscal-governance-reforms-district-level-improving-fund-flow-utilisation-development-schemes/>

decisions frequently being altered or delayed, making it difficult for schools to rely on consistent support for long-term development.

Another challenge faced by government schools is the issue of inadequate teacher salaries. Teachers in these schools often receive lower pay compared to their counterparts in private schools, which discourages qualified and experienced educators from applying for or staying in these positions. This leads to a shortage of skilled teachers, affecting the overall quality of education provided to students. As a result, the lack of proper compensation for teachers is a key factor that undermines the effectiveness of the education system.

6. Solutions to Improve Education in Chennai

To guarantee quality education for everyone, several essential steps can be adopted. First, the government must significantly increase its financial support for public education. More funds should be allocated to government schools with strict measures to ensure these resources are properly used. Direct financial assistance should be given to schools specifically for improving infrastructure and integrating digital learning tools. Second, there is a pressing need to enhance both teacher training and recruitment processes. By offering comprehensive training programs, teachers can be better equipped to make classroom learning more interactive and effective. Additionally, providing attractive salaries can help in drawing and retaining talented educators in the public sector.

Third, collaboration between the public and private sectors should be actively encouraged. Partnerships with private companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can bring in much-needed technology and educational support to government-run institutions. Furthermore, expanding scholarship programs can play a vital role in supporting students from economically weaker sections and ensuring equal learning opportunities. Lastly, the curriculum must be revised to incorporate contemporary teaching techniques that promote critical thinking and problem-solving. With the rapid advancement in technology, it is also crucial to expand access to digital learning platforms and online education, enabling students to stay on par with international academic standards.

Chennai's education system is a mix of excellence and challenges. While the city boasts some of India's top schools and universities, inequality in education quality and funding remains a major issue. Government schools struggle with inadequate resources, while private schools

cater only to those who can afford high fees⁶. Increased investment, better teacher training, and stronger public-private partnerships are essential to improving education quality.

By addressing these challenges, Chennai can ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has access to quality education, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and empowered society.

7. Political Will and Its Role in Education Funding in Chennai

Despite constitutional guarantees, the quality and accessibility of education in Chennai largely depend on political decisions regarding funding and policy implementation. The government has initiated several programs to improve public education, but budget constraints, administrative inefficiencies, and shifting political priorities often hinder progress.

7.1. Budget Allocation for Education

Tamil Nadu has long held a reputation for being one of the more proactive states in India when it comes to investing in education. Historically, it has demonstrated a relatively strong commitment to funding its public education system. However, despite this reputation, the actual allocation for education, when measured as a percentage of the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), still falls short of what is ideally required to meet the growing demands of a modern and inclusive educational framework. This shortfall is particularly evident in government-run schools in urban areas like Chennai, where there is a persistent struggle to secure adequate funding. These schools often lack basic infrastructure, face delays or inadequacies in disbursing teacher salaries, and are unable to provide essential digital tools and resources necessary for contemporary learning. While flagship programs such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have made a significant difference in improving student retention and attendance, they primarily address access and enrolment rather than the actual quality of education being delivered. As a result, many students remain in school without truly benefiting from a robust, well-rounded academic experience.

⁶ TOI Education, 8 Popular Schools in Chennai One Can Consider for Quality Education, TIMES OF INDIA (Dec. 5, 2024), <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/news/8-popular-schools-in-chennai-one-can-consider-for-quality-education/articleshow/115451896.cms>>

7.2. Bureaucratic Delays and Mismanagement

Despite the allocation of funds to the education sector, a significant challenge lies in the timely disbursement of these resources. Often, there are delays and inefficiencies in the administrative process, which prevent schools from receiving the necessary financial support when they need it most. As a result, essential infrastructure upgrades—such as repairing buildings, maintaining classrooms, and improving sanitation facilities—are postponed indefinitely. Many school premises continue to suffer from neglect, with problems like leaking roofs, broken furniture, insufficient classrooms, and a lack of proper toilets being common, especially in rural and underprivileged areas. Moreover, the issue is further compounded by the persistent shortage of qualified teachers. Political interference frequently undermines the hiring process, where merit is overlooked in favor of favoritism and connections. This leads to the appointment of underqualified or inadequately trained teachers, and in some cases, positions remain vacant due to stalled recruitment. Together, these factors contribute to the overall decline in the quality of education, disproportionately affecting students who rely on public schooling for their future.

7.3. Influence of Privatization

Chennai is home to a large number of private schools, which generally enjoy better financial support and infrastructure when compared to government-run institutions. These private schools often offer improved academic resources, modern facilities, and more favorable student-teacher ratios, making them more appealing to parents. As a result, a growing number of families opt for private education, even at significant personal expense. This widespread preference has, over time, contributed to a decline in public interest and government commitment toward upgrading government schools. Despite the Right to Education (RTE) Act requiring private institutions to allocate 25% of their seats to children from economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups, the actual implementation of this provision remains inconsistent and uneven across the city⁷. Many schools either fail to comply fully or create barriers that discourage enrollment under this quota, thereby limiting its intended impact on educational equity.

⁷ Arun C. Mehta, *Analysing School Infrastructure, Enrolment Patterns, and Teacher Distribution Towards NEP 2020 Goals based on UDISEPlus 2023-24 Data*, EDUCATION FOR ALL IN INDIA (Mar. 2025), <https://educationforallinindia.com/analysing-school-infrastructure-enrolment-patterns-and-teacher-distribution-towards-nep-2020-goals-based-on-udiseplus-2023-24-data/>.

While political parties often promise education reforms during elections, actual improvements remain slow and inconsistent. The gap between policy announcements and their execution highlights the need for stronger political commitment to constitutional mandates.

8. Educational Quality and Political Commitment

Beyond funding, political will is crucial in ensuring high-quality education. In Chennai, the quality of education varies widely depending on school type, teacher availability, and resource allocation.

8.1. Teacher Recruitment and Training

Government schools frequently struggle due to a lack of adequately trained teachers, which significantly hampers the quality of education students receive. When teachers are not properly equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills, it becomes difficult to engage students effectively, resulting in poor academic performance and reduced learning outcomes. One of the major contributing factors to this issue is the insufficient investment in teacher training programs. These programs often operate with limited funding, which restricts the development and implementation of modern teaching techniques and resources. As a result, many teachers continue to rely on outdated methods that fail to meet the evolving needs of the classroom. Furthermore, the recruitment process in educational departments is sometimes influenced by political considerations, where appointments are made based on personal or political affiliations rather than merit. This undermines the integrity of the system and leads to the selection of less qualified candidates over more capable ones, further exacerbating the challenges faced by government schools in delivering quality education.

8.2. Curriculum and Learning Outcomes

A significant concern in the Indian education system, especially in many public schools, is the continued reliance on outdated curricula that prioritize rote memorization over practical skill development. This traditional approach often emphasizes learning by repetition rather than fostering critical thinking, creativity, or problem-solving abilities among students. As a result, students may excel at recalling information but lack the necessary skills to apply knowledge in real-life situations. Furthermore, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and digital literacy, which are essential in today's technology-driven world, remain largely inaccessible in government-run schools. This is primarily due to the shortage of trained

teachers, insufficient digital infrastructure, and a general lack of investment in modern learning tools and technologies. The situation is further highlighted by the findings of national assessments like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which consistently reveal that a large number of students in elementary grades are unable to perform basic tasks such as reading simple sentences or solving basic math problems. These issues point to systemic gaps in the quality of education provided in public institutions and underscore the urgent need for educational reforms that focus on both infrastructure and pedagogy.

8.3. Infrastructure and Technology in Schools

In recent years, there has been a noticeable divide in the quality of educational resources available between private and government schools. Advanced learning environments such as smart classrooms equipped with digital tools are becoming increasingly common in private institutions. These technologies allow students to engage with interactive content, access online resources, and benefit from personalized learning. However, most government schools are still deprived of such modern facilities. In many of these schools, even the most basic infrastructure, such as consistent internet connectivity and functioning computer laboratories, is missing. This lack severely restricts students' exposure to contemporary methods of education, which are essential for developing digital literacy and keeping up with global learning standards. A significant reason behind this persistent gap is the approach taken by political leaders, who often focus on short-term schemes or populist measures that yield immediate visibility rather than making sustained, long-term investments in strengthening the foundational infrastructure of public education. As a result, the systemic issues in government schools remain unaddressed, widening the educational disparity between different socio-economic groups.

While India's Constitution guarantees education as a fundamental right, the effectiveness of this mandate depends on political will. In Chennai, disparities in funding, infrastructure, and teacher availability highlight the gap between constitutional provisions and actual implementation⁸. Stronger political commitment, increased funding, and better governance are necessary to improve the quality of education and ensure that constitutional promises translate into reality for every student. Only through sustained political effort can Chennai achieve an equitable and high-quality education system that benefits all sections of society.

⁸ YOUR SMART CLASS, Constitutional Provisions of Education in India: Complete Analysis, <https://yoursmartclass.com/constitutional-provisions-of-education-in-india-complete-analysis/>

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, education is not just a basic necessity but a powerful instrument for shaping individuals and transforming societies. The Indian Constitution rightly acknowledges this by recognizing education as a fundamental right under Article 21A, thereby committing to providing free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14. Alongside, the Directive Principles of State Policy urge the government to give special attention to promoting education, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Despite these strong constitutional guarantees, the ground reality in a city like Chennai reveals a gap between legal commitments and actual implementation.

Although Chennai boasts high literacy levels and is home to several reputed educational institutions, there exists a sharp divide between public and private schooling. Government schools, despite being the backbone of accessible education, are plagued by poor infrastructure, outdated pedagogical approaches, a shortage of trained teachers, and a lack of digital tools. On the other hand, private schools offer better learning environments but remain out of reach for economically weaker sections due to prohibitive costs. This creates a situation where the promise of equal educational opportunity remains unfulfilled for many children.

Moreover, one of the major roadblocks in improving public education is the inefficient and inadequate allocation of government funds. While programs such as the Right to Education Act, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have been successful in boosting enrollment figures, they have not been equally effective in enhancing the quality of education. Issues like political interference in hiring teachers, administrative delays, and a lack of focus on innovation further slow down progress.

To genuinely fulfill the constitutional vision of inclusive and equitable education, a multi-pronged approach is essential. This includes increased and smarter public investment in schools, regular teacher training, adoption of modern teaching tools, and improved accountability in the education system. Collaborations with private stakeholders and non-governmental organizations can also play a vital role in closing the quality gap. Ultimately, only by prioritizing long-term educational reform over short-term political gains can we ensure that every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, receives the quality education they deserve.

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