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FINDINGS

The primary objective of the study was to analyse the growth and public provisioning for secondary education in India during the post-Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) period, spanning from FY 2009–10 to FY 2019–20. The study is motivated by the persistent gap between policy aspirations and the ground reality of secondary education in the country. Despite a long lineage of educational commissions — from Wood's Despatch (1854) and the Kothari Commission (1964–66) to the National Education Policy (2020) — consistently recommending a public expenditure norm of at least 6 percent of GDP on education, this benchmark has never been achieved. Against this backdrop, the study critically examines the current scenario and public provisioning for secondary education in Indian context. Drawing on diverse data sources such as UDISE+, Ministry of Education reports, Indian Public Finance Statistics, the Economic Survey, Project Approval Board minutes, and RTI responses, the research employs descriptive statistics, Compound Annual Growth Rate, Coefficient of Variation, Standard Deviation, and Principal Component Analysis to offer a rigorous and multidimensional evaluation of secondary education financing at pan-India and state levels.

The study's first major finding pertains to the current state of secondary education at both national and state levels. The study reveals significant quantitative expansion over the years — in the number of institutions, teachers, and student enrolments — yet this expansion presents a deeply contrasting picture when examined alongside performance indicators. Notable shortfalls persist in transition rates and the Gender Parity Index, and dropout rates remain stubbornly high. Key enrolment indicators — the Gross Enrolment Ratio, Net Enrolment Ratio, Age-Specific Enrolment Ratio, and Adjusted-NER — collectively confirm that India remains far from attaining universal secondary education even in purely quantitative terms. A further significant finding is the declining share of enrolment in government-run schools, despite the fact that government and government-aided institutions continue to account for the majority of total schools and serve most of India's students. The inter-state scenario, analysed through PCA, reveals slow and deeply uneven progress. For the composite EDI, Goa leads, followed by Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Himachal Pradesh, while Bihar records the minimum value, followed by Nagaland, Jharkhand, Assam, and Chhattisgarh. Notably, some relatively less-developed states such as Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura achieve higher EDI values than expected due to targeted education reforms, underscoring the urgent need for differentiated, state-specific policy interventions.

The second major finding provides an in-depth analysis of the trends and patterns in public financing of secondary education in India at the national and state levels from FY 2009-10 to FY 2019-20, drawing on data from the Ministry of Education, Indian Public Finance Statistics, Economic Survey, and Budget Documents. The overarching finding is one of persistent and structural inadequacy of public resource allocation despite the growing importance of secondary education. The share of secondary education in India's GDP remained below 1 percent throughout the study period — far short of the internationally recommended threshold of 1.5 percent — while its share in the total budget stagnated at around 3 percent, with no meaningful upward policy priority visible. Non-plan expenditure dominated overwhelmingly at 82.12 percent of the overall revenue budget, meaning most funds were absorbed by salaries and administrative costs, with little remaining for developmental activities. In inter-sectoral terms, elementary education received over 49 percent of government resources, followed by secondary education at 31 percent, a share that declined from 31.16 percent in 2009–10 to 29.50 percent in 2012–13, and again from 33.06 percent in 2017–18 to 32 percent in 2019–20. The Central Government's share in secondary education expenditure stagnated at 0.1 percent of GDP, placing a disproportionate financing burden on states. In real terms, per-student and per-capita expenditure recorded no substantial improvement, indicating that resources did not keep pace with growing enrolments. The share of expenditure on textbooks, scholarships, and student welfare — items directly bearing on quality and equity — was already low and declined further. Wide inter-state disparities persist, with secondary education expenditure as a percentage of NSDP ranging from 2.64 percent in Tripura to 0.43 percent in Gujarat in FY 2019–20.

The prominent finding of the third objective examines the financing of secondary education through the two flagship centrally sponsored schemes — RMSA and its successor, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. The analysis reveals deep and recurring systemic failures that have severely undermined the effectiveness of both programmes. Actual funds released by the Centre and states were consistently and substantially lower than approved outlays, and the fund utilisation ratio fell below 60 percent in four out of nine study years, primarily due to delayed release of funds with bulk disbursements arriving only in the final quarter. Under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the same structural problems persisted — delayed state share releases, low utilisation ratios, and declining central allocations — indicating that the consolidation of three schemes into Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan failed to resolve the fundamental issues of timely fund disbursement and adequate resource mobilisation.

The thesis recommends several policy interventions to strengthen India's education system. Education spending must be urgently raised to at least 6 percent of GDP, with a minimum of 1.5 percent dedicated to secondary education, prioritising infrastructure, teacher training, curricular reforms, and quality assurance. Secondary education needs urgent expansion and should be made compulsory, given its proven returns for economic growth, health, and gender equity. High dropout rates, particularly at the secondary level, must be tackled through targeted government policies. Poorer states require greater central funding to ensure balanced growth, and the matching fund conditions under SSA should be relaxed for fiscally constrained states. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan programme must be strengthened through transparent governance, regular auditing, and strict monitoring. Finally, the study underscores the urgent need for a robust, disaggregated data system covering physical, financial, and private investment dimensions of school education, in line with the recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020.