UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Shrinking Share of Education in the Budget

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 July 2026 · SOCIAL ISSUES · GS2

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

The Shrinking Share of Education in the Budget

The Indian Express 22 July 2026 **GS2**

Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A country cannot legislate ambition and underfund it at the same time. Education keeps being named the priority in policy while its share of the budget quietly shrinks, and that contradiction is the real story of Indian schooling.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Education financing is one of the most durable GS Paper 2 themes because it links a **fundamental right**, a **flagship policy** and the machinery of **fiscal federalism** in a single question. When you can explain why a **6 per cent of GDP** target set in the 1960s remains unmet, you are demonstrating the ability to connect policy intent with budgetary reality, which is precisely the social-sector analysis examiners look for.

It also sharpens your equity argument. Under-financing does not hurt everyone equally; it hurts first-generation learners, government-school children and poorer states hardest, which lets you fold the equity dimension into what could otherwise be a dry numbers answer.

GS Paper 2: Issues relating to development and management of the social sector, especially education.

GS Paper 2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising from their design and implementation.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the **Kothari Commission (1964-66)** first recommended spending **6 per cent of GDP** on education; the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** reaffirmed the same **6 per cent** target; India's combined public spending (Centre and states) has hovered around **3 to 4 per cent of GDP**; the **Right to Education Act, 2009** made elementary education a fundamental right under **Article 21A**; **Samagra Shiksha** is the integrated school-education scheme; and **NIPUN Bharat** drives foundational literacy and numeracy.

For **Mains**, the transferable line is that chronic under-investment is a structural choice, not an accident. It caps learning outcomes, widens equity gaps and hollows out the ambitions written into the NEP, so raising and better targeting spending is a policy imperative rather than a fiscal luxury.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **6 per cent of GDP** benchmark is one of the oldest unmet targets in Indian public policy. The **Kothari Commission** proposed it in the mid-1960s as the level of public investment a developing nation needed to build a modern education system. It was reaffirmed in national policy statements across decades and again, most recently, in the **NEP 2020**. Yet the actual combined outlay of the Centre and the states has stayed in the **3 to 4 per cent** band for years, and the share of education within total government budgets has tended to slip rather than rise.

This matters because the intervening decades added obligations. The **Right to Education Act, 2009** turned elementary schooling into an enforceable right, **Samagra Shiksha** consolidated school-education spending, and **NIPUN Bharat** set foundational-literacy goals. Each of these commitments assumes resources that a shrinking budget share cannot comfortably supply.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The target is old, the gap is persistent

The distance between the **6 per cent** aspiration and the **3 to 4 per cent** reality is not a one-year shortfall but a structural pattern. When the denominator, GDP, grows and the education share does not keep pace, real per-child investment stagnates even as enrolment obligations expand under the RTE Act.

Under-financing shows up as weak outcomes

Money is not sufficient for quality, but its absence is a reliable cause of poor quality. Thin financing constrains teacher recruitment, learning materials, infrastructure and foundational-literacy work under **NIPUN Bharat**, which is why learning-outcome surveys keep flagging gaps in basic reading and arithmetic.

The burden is shared but uneven

Because education is on the **Concurrent List**, both the Centre and the states finance it, and the poorer states, which carry the heaviest demographic load, have the weakest fiscal capacity. So under-financing is also an equity and federal-balance problem, not just an aggregate one.

MARKER	RECOMMENDED OR INTENDED	ACTUAL POSITION
Public spending on education	6 per cent of GDP (Kothari, NEP 2020)	Around 3 to 4 per cent, Centre and states combined
Legal obligation	Free and compulsory elementary education, RTE Act 2009	Enforceable right under Article 21A
Delivery vehicle	Samagra Shiksha, integrated funding	Dependent on annual budget priority
Learning floor	Foundational literacy for all under NIPUN Bharat	Learning-outcome gaps persist

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Read education spending on two axes at once: the **quantum** and the **quality of allocation**. The quantum question asks whether the share is rising toward **6 per cent**; the allocation question asks whether the rupees go where learning is weakest, foundational grades, under-resourced states and first-generation learners. A good answer refuses the false choice between more money and better spending, and argues for both. This dual frame stops you from writing a one-note demand for higher outlays and lets you show that under-financing and mis-targeting are separate problems that need separate fixes.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

```
Kothari 1964-66 sets 6 per cent of GDP -> NEP 2020 reaffirms it -> actual spend stays at 3 to 4 per cent -> share in budgets slips -> RTE, Samagra Shiksha and NIPUN Bharat obligations grow -> per-child investment stagnates -> weak learning outcomes and widening equity gaps -> raise quantum and sharpen targeting
```

WAY FORWARD

1. **Raise the quantum on a credible path.** Both the Centre and the states should commit to a time-bound glide path toward the **6 per cent of GDP** benchmark rather than treating it as a permanently deferred aspiration.
2. **Target the foundational years.** Protect and expand funding for **NIPUN Bharat** and early grades, where every rupee has the highest long-run return in learning outcomes.
3. **Correct the federal imbalance.** Use central transfers and **Samagra Shiksha** design to route more resources to demographically heavy, fiscally weak states so equity does not depend on a state's own budget.

4. **Tie money to outcomes.** Link incremental spending to measurable learning indicators and school infrastructure norms so that higher outlays translate into better schooling, not just larger budgets.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked repeatedly on education policy, the RTE Act, and the gap between policy goals and delivery in the social sector. This editorial lets you anchor that theme in the **NEP 2020** commitment and the current financing shortfall, giving your answer a data-backed, contemporary edge.

Practice question: "Six decades after the Kothari Commission, India still spends far below the 6 per cent of GDP target for education." Examine the causes and consequences of this chronic under-financing, and suggest measures for both the Centre and the states. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: Indian Express, Ministry of Education, PIB

Source: The Shrinking Share of Education in the Budget — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

22 Jul France Bans Social Media for Under-15s: Lessons for...

17 Jul Maharashtra Women Farmers Act 2026 Recognising the...

15 Jul Draft National Health Research Policy 2026 Released for...

14 Jul Third NAMASTE Day Marks the Push for Mechanised...

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

📖 Read Full Article on Ujiyari →

https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/ie-education-budget-share-2026/