

Public Policy and Governance in Education for Quality, Equity and Sustainable Development in Himachal Pradesh (1971-2026)

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ABSTRACT

Education has remained one of the most important medium of social and economic development in Himachal Pradesh since the fulfillment of statehood in 1971. To upgrade educational access, quality, equity and sustainable development, the Government of India and the Government of Himachal Pradesh have introduced numerous educational policies and governance reforms over the last five years. This study examines the development of public policy and educational governance in Himachal Pradesh from 1971 to 2026. The present study is based on theoretical in nature and based on secondary data collected from official government reports, policy documents, Census publications, UDISE+, the National Education Policy (1986 and 2020), the Right to Education Act (2009), Samagra Shiksha, the Performance Grading Index (PGI), and the Himachal Pradesh Economic Survey. The study reveals that Himachal Pradesh has achieved significant advancement in literacy, school enrolment, educational access, gender parity and institutional governance. However, educational outcomes continue to be influenced by challenges such as- infrastructure maintenance, teacher deployment, unequal digital access and geographical barriers etc. The study highlights the effective governance, evidence-based policy-making and continuous policy evaluation is essential for achieving quality education, educational equity and sustainable development.

Keywords: Public Policy, Educational Governance, Quality, Equity and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Education is universally considered as the basis of social transformation, economic progress and viable national development. It empowers individuals with knowledge, skills, values and competencies that assist them to participate proficiently in society while contributing to economic productivity and democratic governance. The standard of an education system depends not only on the presence of educational institutions but also on the fruitfulness of public policies and governance system that navigate planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, governments create educational policies to secure equitable access to education, improve learning outcomes, strengthen institutional accountability and respond to emerging social and economic needs. Public policy in education refers to the laws, regulations, programmes, and strategic decisions utilized by governments to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes. Educational governance includes the institutional arrangements, administrative structures, financial management, leadership practices, and accountability systems through which these policies are implemented. Collectively, public policy and governance specify how educational resources are allocated, how institutions function and how educational goals are achieved.

The educational development of Himachal Pradesh has undergone notable transformation since the state achieved full statehood on 25 January 1971. Although, it's mountainous terrain, dispersed settlements and geographical constraints, the state has consistently prioritized education as an integral part of socio-economic development. Successive governments have extended school infrastructure, improved teacher recruitment, promoted literacy, strengthened educational administration and intensity access to education in rural and remote areas of Himachal Pradesh. These continuous endeavors have enabled Himachal Pradesh to emerge as one of the most prominent states in educational development.

The development of educational policy in India has profound effect on educational governance in Himachal Pradesh. The National Policy on Education (1986) highlighted universal access, educational quality, teacher education and equality of educational opportunity. The Programme of Action 1992 (POA) further, strengthened policy implementation through administrative reforms and institutional development. The launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) move faster the universalization of elementary education by improving school infrastructure, community participation and teacher availability. Thereafter, the Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) established elementary education as a legal right and introduced standards relating to school infrastructure, teacher qualifications and pupil–teacher ratios.

Educational reforms continued through Samagra Shiksha (2018), which integrated elementary, secondary and higher secondary education under a single framework. The policy aimed to enhance educational quality, promote inclusive education, more resilient digital learning and enhance institutional effectiveness. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marked another important milestone by proposing comprehensive reforms in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, governance, teacher education, technology integration and multidisciplinary learning. Further, the policy also aligns India's educational vision with the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Educational governance in Himachal Pradesh has also developed gradually during this period. Administrative decentralization, the establishment of School Management Committees, district-level educational planning, digital educational databases and performance monitoring systems has strengthened accountability and transparency. Governance has increasingly become evidence-based, with educational planning supported by official statistical systems and periodic monitoring of educational indicators.

Although, Himachal Pradesh has attained substantial progress in literacy, school enrolment, educational access and gender parity, several challenges continue to influence educational development. Adverse geographical factors, uneven digital infrastructure, decreasing enrolment in some government schools, teacher deployment in remote areas and the need for continuous capacity building remain important concerns. These challenges highlight the need to examine educational policies not only from the perspective of their formulation but also in terms of their implementation and governance.

Considering this, the present study examines the evolution of public policy and governance in education in Himachal Pradesh from 1971 to 2026. The present study analyses how educational policies have contributed to quality education, educational equity and sustainable development through improvements in governance, institutional development and educational planning. The study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from official government reports, policy documents and educational statistics.

Objectives of the study

The present study aims to analyze the following objectives:

1. To study the development of major educational policy in Himachal Pradesh from 1971 to 2026.
2. To study the educational governance mechanisms adopted by the government during this period.

3. To study the contribution of public policies towards improving the quality of education in Himachal Pradesh.
4. To study the policy initiatives by the government to promoting the educational equity and equality.
5. To study the role of educational governance in achieving sustainable educational development.
6. To study the growth of literacy in Himachal Pradesh in relation to educational policies and governance from 1971 to 2026.

Data collection

The present study is based exclusively on secondary data collected through online from official government reports, policy documents, and educational statistics. Data and information has been collected from Census reports, UDISE+, the National Education Policy (1986 and 2020) and the Right to Education Act (2009), Samagra Shiksha reports, the Performance Grading Index, the Himachal Pradesh Economic Survey and other official government publications.

1. Major Educational Policies Implemented (1971-2026)

The Major Educational Policies Implemented (1971-2026) are given below:-

Table No. 1

Years	Policy/ Programme	Major Focus	Relevancy to Himachal Pradesh
1971	Statehood of Himachal Pradesh	State-Level Educational Planning	Beginning of independent educational governance
1986	National Policy On Education	Universal Access, Quality	Adopted by the state
1992	Programme Of Action	Implementation Of NPE	Administrative reforms
2001	Sarvshiksha Abhiyan	Universal Elementary Education	Expansion of school access
2009	Right To Education Act	Free And Compulsory Education	Legal guarantee for elementary education
2018	Samagra Shiksha	Integrated School Education	School quality and inclusion
2020	National Education Policy	Governance, Quality, Multidisciplinary Learning	State implementation underway
2021	NIPUN Bharat	Foundational Literacy And Numeracy	Early grade learning
2022	PM SHRI Schools	NEP Demonstration Schools	Quality improvement

** Ministry Of Education, Government of India. UDISE+ Publication & Statistics.

Table1 shows that the steady progression of educational public policy in Himachal Pradesh following statehood in 1971. The policy framework shows a clear transition from expanding educational access during the beginning stages to improving educational equity, quality, governance, and sustainability in past few years. While prior efforts first and foremost focused on improve school enrolment and literacy, contemporary policies such as - NEP 2020 emphasize competency-based learning, digital education, institutional autonomy and evidence-based governance. This progression demonstrates that educational policy has become increasingly comprehensive, responding to changing national priorities and global educational goals.

2. Educational Governance Frameworks

Major educational governance Framework are given in Table No. 2.

Table No. 2.

Governance Level	Responsible Institution	Major Function
National	Ministry of Education	National Policy Formulation
State	Department Of Education, Himachal Pradesh	State Implementation
Directorate	Directorate Of School Education	Administration
Distric	Distric Education Officer	Monitoring
Block	Block Education Officer	Supervision
School	School Management Committee	Community Participation

**** Performance Grading Index (PGI)(UDISE++)**

Table 2 depicts the utmost educational governance system operating at different administrative levels in Himachal Pradesh. The governance structure expend from the national and state levels to district, block and school levels, therefore creating a multi-level system for policy formulation, implementation, supervision, and community participation etc. The participation of District and Block Education Offices facilitates the implementation and monitoring of educational programmes at the local level, whereas School Management Committees provide opportunities for community participation in educational settings. This multi-level structure shows that educational governance has continuously moved towards closer collaboration, decentralization, monitoring and accountability. Effective coordination and cooperation among these levels is essential for change educational policies into meaningful outcomes at the school level.

3. Quality Education Indicator

Quality Education Indicator are given in the table no 3 as follows:-

Table No. 3

Indicator	Data
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) i)middle iii) secondary	102.2% 93.6%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio(PTR) i) primary ii) middle iii) secondary/ sr. secondary	12:1 11:1 10:1
Trained Teachers' for CWSN i) female ii) male	64.34% 66.52%
teaching through computer (i) female (ii) male	54.5% 53.7%
School With Electricity	99.43%
School With Drinking Water	100%
Schools With Girls' Toilets	100%
libraries Facilities	99.48%

**** UDISE and report 2025-26**

Table 3 describes the selected indicators of quality education in Himachal Pradesh. The indicators include Gross Enrolment Ratio, Pupil–Teacher Ratio, professionally qualified teachers and the availability of essential school infrastructure such as - electricity, drinking water, girls' toilets and library facilities etc. These indicators are

generally used by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the quality of school education. A higher Gross Enrolment Ratio and a lower Pupil–Teacher Ratio indicate better access to education and improved classroom interaction. Similarly, the accessible of basic infrastructure and digital facilities reflects the state's commitment to make an inclusive learning environment. Generally, these indicators reveal the contribution of educational policies and governance reforms toward improving the quality of education in Himachal Pradesh. Official UDISE+ reports show that continued national improvements in infrastructure such as electricity, drinking water, toilets, library facilities and internet access in schools over recent years.

4. Education Equality Initiatives

Education Equality Initiatives is given in the Table No. 4 as follows:-

Table No. 4

Area	Programme
Girls' Education	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya(KGBP)
Sc/St/OBC/Minority Students	Pre metric Scholarships
Children With Special Needs	Inclusive Education Under Samagra Shiksha
Economically Weaker Section	Free Textbooks, Uniform, PM POSHAN
Rural Students	Residential Schools And Transport Support

**** Himachal Pradesh Economic Survey 2025-26**

Table 4 shows the major government initiatives undertaken to promote educational equity and equality in Himachal Pradesh. The initiatives cover diverse aspects of disadvantage as well as gender, caste, disability, socio-economic conditions, and geographical location. Programmes such as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya support educational opportunities for girls, while scholarships and other encouragement programmes seek to reduce financial barriers faced by disadvantaged learners. Inclusive Education under Samagra Shiksha mark the educational needs of children with disabilities, while provisions such as free textbooks, nutrition support, uniforms and other educational assistance help improve participation among economically weaker section students. These initiatives suggests that educational policy in Himachal Pradesh has gradually moved beyond the objective of providing access towards ensuring inclusion, fairness, and equal educational opportunities.

5. Governance and Sustainable Development

Governance and Sustainable Development are given below:-

Table No.5

Governance Indicator	Contribution To SDG 4
Udise+	Evidence-Based Planning
Pgi	School Performance Monitoring
Samagra Shiksha	Inclusive And Quality Education
Nep 2020	Governance Reform
Digital Monitoring System	Transparency And Accountability

****PGI Data Source and Ministry Of Education.**

Table 5 represents the important governance mechanisms and initiatives that contribute to sustainable educational development in Himachal Pradesh. The utilize of systems such as UDISE+ and the Performance Grading Index (PGI) strengthens evidence-based planning, monitoring and assessment of educational performance. Samagra Shiksha provides an integrated framework for improving access, inclusion, quality and infrastructure, whereas the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes long-term educational transformation through improved governance, competency-based learning, technology and equitable opportunities. Digital monitoring mechanisms

further support transparency and accountability in educational administration. Generally, these initiatives indicate a progressive movement towards a more data-driven, accountable, inclusive, and sustainable education system.

6. Growth of Literacy in Himachal Pradesh (1971 To 2026)

Growth of Literacy in Himachal Pradesh (1971 to 2026) are given in the Table No. 6:-

Table No. 6:-

Census Year	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Overall Literacy (%)
1971	43.19	20.23	31.71
1981	53.19	31.46	42.33
1991	75.36	52.13	63.75
2001	85.35	67.42	76.48
2011	89.53	75.93	82.80
2021 (Survey Estimated)	94.90	91.70	93.3

**** Census of India (Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh, Government of Himachal Pradesh Table 13.07)**

****2019-2021 Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (Himachal Pradesh Economic Survey).**

Table 6 indicated that a continuous rise in literacy over successive census years. The rise from 63.75% in 1991 to 82.80% in 2011 exhibit the positive impact of sustained educational investment, adult literacy programmes, expansion of schooling facilities and government initiatives promoting universal education. The improvement also indicated that educational policies implemented after statehood have contributed significantly to enhancing educational participation and human development within the state.

Implications

The present study has vital implications for education because it examines the development of public policy and educational governance in Himachal Pradesh over a long period, from 1971 to 2026. The study helps in understanding how changes in educational policies, governance structures, access, equity, quality and literacy have shaped the educational system of the state.

- 1. Understanding educational development:** The study provides a historical perspective on the development of education in Himachal Pradesh since 1971. It helps educators, researchers and policymakers understand how the education system has changed over time.
- 2. Improving educational policy:** The study can help policymakers identify the strengths and limitations of past educational policies. This understanding can contribute to the formulation of more effective and context-specific policies in the future.
- 3. Strengthening educational governance:** The study indicates the importance of effective administration, monitoring, accountability, decentralization and stakeholder participation in achieving educational objectives.
- 4. Promoting quality education:** The study highlights the indicators such as enrolment, teacher availability, digital facilities, school infrastructure and learning opportunities. These indicators can help educational administrators understand the areas that require continued attention for improving quality.
- 5. Promoting educational equity:** The study is important for identifying the importance of providing equitable educational opportunities to disadvantaged groups, girls, children with disabilities and learners living in backwoods and difficult geographical areas.

6. **Understanding literacy development:** The historical analysis of literacy provides an important measure of educational progress in Himachal Pradesh. It helps researchers and policymakers understand the relationship between the expansion of educational policies and the growth of literacy.
7. **Supporting teachers and teacher educators:** The study can help teachers and teacher educators to understand the changing priorities of educational policy, including inclusive education, competency-based learning, digital education, foundational literacy and numeracy, and sustainable development.
8. **Providing a basis for future educational planning:** By examining historical trends and government data, the study can provide a foundation for identifying emerging educational needs and challenges, thereby strengthening future educational planning in Himachal Pradesh.

Conclusion

The study highlights the important role of educational policies and governance in shaping the development of education in Himachal Pradesh from 1971 to 2026. It provides a clear understanding of changes in equity, quality, access, governance and literacy throughout the period. The study can help policymakers identify existing gaps and improve future educational policies. The study also emphasizes the need for effective governance, teacher support, inclusive education and better educational facilities. In conclusion, it provides a useful foundation for addressing emerging educational challenges and strengthening future educational planning in Himachal Pradesh.

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