



# The Role Of CSR In Enhancing The Primary Education In India

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## Abstract

Primary education is the pillar of a country's growth, the foundation of lifelong learning and societal change. In India, though there are numerous government initiatives, primary education still grapples with serious issues like poor infrastructure, shortages of teachers, poor learning outcomes, and inequalities in access. On this background, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has arisen as a strategic means by which the corporate world can make positive contributions to the education sector.

This research paper discusses the significance of CSR in improving primary education in India and the nature, extent, and effect of corporate interventions. It discusses how, as per the mandate of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, the CSR funds of companies are being utilized for primary education activities such as school infrastructure development, e-learning, training of teachers, and community programs. The article introduces secondary data analysis and case studies of the chosen companies recognized for effective educational CSR initiatives.

Findings reflect that CSR interventions have improved access and quality significantly in many of the underserved areas, but sustainability, accountability, and regional imbalances still pose challenges. The report concludes with suggestions for aligning CSR interventions with national education priorities like the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and proposing frameworks for increased public-private partnerships to enable long-term education development.

**Key words:** - Corporate Social Responsibility, Primary Education, CSR in India, Educational Development, Companies Act 2013, Learning Outcomes, School Infrastructure, Public-Private Partnership, NEP 2020.

## Introduction

Education is a basic human right and a strong catalyst of personal, social, and economic development. Of all the categories of education, primary education is of utmost importance, as it provides a foundation for subsequent learning and the acquisition of skills. In India, the government has initiated various efforts, including the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, towards enhancing the provision of and access to quality primary education. Nonetheless, despite all these attempts, issues like poor infrastructure, high drop-out rates, poor teacher-pupil ratios, and socio-economic inequalities still continue to hamper the efficiency of primary education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

To address these lacunae, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has come to be a significant vehicle by which the private sector makes contributions to social development, including education. With the passing of the Companies Act, 2013, India became the first nation to make CSR expenditure mandatory for qualifying companies by law. Education has been recognized as one of the main areas falling under Schedule VII of the Act, prompting businesses to direct their efforts towards developing educational opportunities, especially for the less privileged.

This research study seeks to explore the contribution of CSR towards improving primary education in India. It looks at how corporate organizations are making education interventions possible, what type of intervention is being carried out, and what difference they are making in terms of improving access, infrastructure, quality, and learning outcomes at the primary level. Through secondary data analysis and case-based evidence, the study seeks to put in the limelight the best practices, the challenges, and how the CSR interventions can be made to align more with national education priorities.

## Objectives

- To examine the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in funding primary education in India.
- To examine the kind of educational activities that corporate businesses engage in under CSR.
- To assess the impact of CSR on the accessibility and quality of primary education.

## Hypothesis

H<sub>1</sub>: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditures significantly contribute to increasing access to primary education in India.

H<sub>2</sub>: The corporation's CSR training programs significantly enhance the quality of primary education.

## Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has also come to be increasingly considered as a route towards sustainable development, particularly in developing nations such as India. According to Carroll's Pyramid of CSR (1991), four levels of corporate responsibility exist: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. The philanthropic aspect generally manifests itself in educational programs, particularly primary education where foundational learning is most important.

The Companies Act, 2013 (Section 135) mandates Indian companies with a certain net worth, turnover, or profit to spend at least 2% of their average net profit of the past three years on CSR initiatives. The Act has specifically put "promoting education" in Schedule VII as one of the areas of focus, and this has helped in increased corporate participation in the cause of education.

Kumar & Prakash (2019) noted that the majority of CSR in India is utilized in educational activities, especially in poor regions. From their study, companies primarily invest in infrastructure development, teacher training, scholarships, and e-learning materials. Goswami (2020) also highlights that CSR helped bridge the knowledge gap in villages by improving educational infrastructure and eradicating school dropout cases.

Nair and Menon (2018) compared CSR reports of top Indian organizations and concluded that while CSR activities have improved school infrastructure and enrollment, their long-term impacts on learning outcomes are still under-explored. Sharma (2021) indicates that aligning CSR educational initiatives with national policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 can lead to more targeted and sustainable outcomes.

Despite these positive findings, Mehta & Singh (2020) refer to problems such as a lack of coordination among stakeholders, inadequate monitoring of CSR activities, and geographical concentration of CSR activities in urban or semi-urban locations. This suggests that greater strategic and participative CSR in education is the hour of need.

Finally, the literature supports the notion that CSR has the potential to make a significant contribution to primary education in India, although further empirical evidence is needed to establish its true worth in access, quality, and outcomes.

## Methodology

### a) Research Design:

This study utilizes a descriptive and analytical research design. It is descriptive in that it aims to explore and describe the contribution and role of CSR in primary education, and analytical in that it evaluates the effectiveness of CSR activities through secondary data analysis.

**b) Nature of Study:**

The research is qualitative and exploratory with quantitative data applied to the greatest extent possible. The research aims to understand the type of CSR programs in primary education and assess the impacts as far as access and quality are concerned.

**c) Data Collection:**

**Secondary Data** was the primary source utilized for this study and was collected from:

- Large Indian companies CSR reports and disclosures.
- Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) CSR portal.
- White papers and reports provided by educational NGOs.
- Academic journals, research reports, and case studies.
- Corporate websites and news stories.

**Case Studies** highlighted the real-life adoption and impact of CSR strategies on primary-level schooling by active CSR participant organizations like Tata Group, Infosys Foundation, Reliance Foundation, Wipro, and so forth.

**d) Sampling:**

A purposive sampling strategy was used to choose companies that:

- Are regulated by the CSR provisions of the Companies Act, 2013.
- Have spent a large amount of their CSR money on the development of education, particularly at the primary level.
- Maintain publicly available CSR performance reports.

**e) Data Analysis:**

Secondary source information collected, for example, from CSR reports by companies, MCA filings, and reports by NGOs was utilized to measure and analyse the scope, type, and importance of CSR efforts towards Indian primary education.

## 1. CSR Expenditure on Education

According to the MCA CSR portal (latest available data), education has continued to be the most prominent sector for CSR spending by Indian companies. On average, 35–40% of total CSR spending is allocated on education-related initiatives annually.

Year	Total CSR Expenditure (INR Cr.)	Expenditure on Education (INR Cr.)	% of Total
2019–20	17,885	6,215	34.75%
2020–21	20,150	7,110	35.28%
2021–22	25,932	9,320	35.94%

(Source: MCA, Annual CSR Reports)

## 2. Types of CSR Initiatives in Primary Education

The CSR reports of the chosen companies depict a series of activities initiated, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities. These include:

- **School Infrastructure Development:** Classroom, toilet, library, and smart classroom construction (e.g., Tata Steel, ITC).
- **E-Learning and Digital Inclusion:** Providing tablets, learning software, and setting up smart learning labs (e.g., Infosys Foundation, Wipro).
- **Teacher Capacity Development Programs:** Government school teacher training workshops and online capacity development programs (e.g., HCL Foundation).
- **Scholarships and Learning Kits:** Supplying school bags, textbooks, school uniforms, and providing scholarships for economically backward children (e.g., Reliance Foundation).

## 3. Case Snapshots

- **Tata Trusts:** Impacted over 4,000 rural schools in Maharashtra and Odisha through infrastructure development and teacher training modules.
- **Infosys Foundation:** Installed software for e-learning in over 2,000 primary schools within Karnataka, presenting an increase by 15-20% of students' motivation.
- **Reliance Foundation:** Initiated the "Education for All" project that benefitted over 1 million children, focusing on tribal and backward regions.

## f) Hypothesis 1:

“CSR expenditures by corporations significantly contribute to improving access to primary education in India.”

### Explanation and Evidence:

- **Logical Connection:**

CSR funds directed toward infrastructure (building classrooms, toilets, providing furniture), scholarships, and mid-day meals directly reduce barriers to school enrolment and attendance, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas.

- **Government Mandate and Data:**

As per Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, companies are required to spend 2% of their average net profits on CSR.

Education is the top focus area for CSR in India (Ministry of Corporate Affairs data shows ~35-40% of CSR funds go to education).

- **Case Study Examples:**

Tata Steel: Through its CSR arm, it runs 1000 Schools Programme, helping children in remote tribal regions access formal education. It has led to a significant rise in school enrollment and retention in Odisha and Jharkhand.

Infosys Foundation: Invested heavily in building classrooms and digital infrastructure for government schools, especially in Karnataka. Reports show improved attendance after infrastructure improvements.

- **Third-Party Evaluation:**

A 2020 study published in the International Journal of Management showed that districts with higher CSR expenditure on education had better primary school enrolment and infrastructure indicators compared to those with minimal CSR presence.

### Conclusion:

There is ample evidence from CSR spending data, government reports, and NGO interventions to support the hypothesis that CSR significantly contributes to improving access to primary education in India.

## Hypothesis 2:

“CSR-funded training programs implemented by corporations significantly enhance the quality of primary education in India.”

### Explanation and Evidence:

- **Logic and Theory:**

Teacher quality and pedagogical support are major determinants of learning outcomes.

CSR-funded training programs often include digital tools, interactive learning, pedagogy improvement, and soft skills training, which enhance teaching delivery and student understanding.

- **Examples of CSR-Funded Teacher Training Impact:**

Bharti Foundation (Airtel): Runs the Satya Bharti Quality Support Program, training government school teachers in student engagement techniques and modern pedagogical practices. Independent assessments have shown improvements in students' reading and math skills.

HCL Foundation: Provides tech-integrated teacher training in Uttar Pradesh, resulting in improved classroom interactivity and learning assessments.

### **Research Support:**

A 2021 research paper in the Journal of Educational Planning and Administration found a positive correlation between CSR-based teacher training programs and student learning outcomes in government schools.

ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) also highlights that schools with regular teacher development support tend to show better performance in foundational literacy and numeracy.

### **Conclusion:**

Evidence from CSR initiatives and academic studies supports that CSR-funded training programs do significantly improve the quality of primary education, validating the hypothesis.

## **Results and Discussion**

Secondary data analysis, CSR reports, and case studies of Indian firms at the forefront provide insightful data on the nature, extent, and impact of CSR in primary education. Results are discussed based on the study aims and hypotheses.

### **1. CSR as a Primary Sponsor of Primary Education**

The study revealed that education is the sector given most importance under CSR activities with over one-third of the total CSR outlays spent on educational advancement. Primary education is particularly gaining a lot of attention in terms of infrastructure improvement, e-learning equipment, and training of teachers. This supports Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> that CSR expenditure plays an important role in improving access to primary education in India.

### **2. Intervention and Innovation Types**

Corporate organizations are not only sponsoring schools but also bringing in new practices such as e-learning modules, STEM labs, and interactive classrooms. Some companies have introduced teacher skill development programs and offered learning aids to students. These initiatives are more than just financial aid, as they directly impact the learning environment and pedagogy.

### 3. Access and Quality Improvement The case studies demonstrated positive effects such as:

- Increase in the number of students, especially girls and underprivileged children.
- Increased retention and attendance levels.
- Enhanced student engagement and performance in primary literacy and numeracy competencies.
- These findings support Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> that CSR activities, especially those that target teacher training and teaching materials, do enhance the quality of primary education.

### 4. Regional and Strategic Gaps

While there have been success stories, even the research indicated imbalances:

- CSR initiatives are generally concentrated in areas surrounding corporate activities, and backward and tribal areas are underserved.
- Failure to synchronize with government plans such as NEP 2020 and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan leads to duplication or waste.

Few organizations have adequate monitoring and evaluation systems to determine the actual short-term effect on learning outcomes.

### 5. Scope for Alignment with National Priorities

There is an urgent need to align CSR education activities with national policy programs like the NEP 2020, which emphasizes foundational literacy, inclusive education, and digital equality. Collective effort by the corporate sector, government, and NGOs can result in much enhanced outreach and sustainability.

### Suggestions and Recommendations

On the basis of discussions and data analysis, some actionable recommendations and suggestions are put forth to strengthen CSR activities in primary education:

#### 1. Alignment with National Education Policies

- CSR activities must be aligned with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with a clear emphasis on foundational literacy, inclusive education, and digital learning.
- The corporate sector must align their CSR activities with government initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan so that there is no replication and the development is coordinated.

## 2. Target Backward Areas

- Firms need to increase their CSR reach in backward and rural areas with poor basic educational infrastructure and resources.
- Need-based mapping can assist in mapping high-need areas.

## 3. Improving Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

- Firms need to build strong monitoring and evaluation systems to evaluate the actual effect of their interventions, particularly on learning outcomes.
- Encourage regular third-party audits and impact assessments to ensure accountability and transparency.

## 4. Encourage Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

- Cooperative models with governments, NGOs, local communities, and corporations can increase the size and sustainability of education initiatives.
- Shared responsibilities can enhance resource efficiency and long-term effect.

## 5. Capacity Building for Teachers

- More emphasis must be laid on ongoing teacher education, rather than infrastructure, in order to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom.
- Funds from CSR can be utilized to set up Teacher Resource Centers or support digital pedagogy workshops.

## Conclusion

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has also become a critical source of support for primary education in India, plugging gaps in access, infrastructure, and quality. The research points out that CSR spending is an area of focus for education, with the corporate world putting money into school infrastructure, digital learning, and teacher education. These activities have had a positive impact on student enrollment, attendance, and learning outcomes, especially in low-access regions.

Yet, there exist issues of regional imbalance, non-sustainability over the long term, and poor assessment of impact. For optimal benefit, CSR activities need to be harmonized with national policy for education such as NEP 2020, increase scope in rural areas, and embrace strong monitoring systems. PPP needs to be strengthened and corporate commitment encouraged on a long-term basis to further boost the contribution of CSR towards changing India's school education sphere.

CSR, therefore, can come to be a very efficient tool in bridge-building across educational inequalities and thus towards a more inclusive quality primary education system in India, if planned strategically and collaboratively.

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