



Is Decline in School Enrolment in India a Cause of Concern?

....Yes, it is

By

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Introduction

Because of the limitations in the educational statistics, at the time of initiating the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994-95, the *Ministry of Education/HRD, Government of India* decided to develop a computerized educational management information system with the school as the unit of data collection and district as the unit of data dissemination and the task to develop such a system was assigned to NIEPA, New Delhi which joined hands with the UNICEF and contributed all through the period 1994-95 to 2017-18. It was only the year 2018-19 onwards that the renamed UDISE+ is being managed by the NIC and located in the *Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education* but the first of its publication was released on 1st July 2021 by the then Minister of Education under the title, UDISE+ 2019-20 Report even failed to mention the national institutions which brought the earlier defunct school education statistics managed by the none other than the Ministry of Education to this level which practically has overcome most of the limitations in Educational Statistics in India.

At the time, when UDISE was managed by the NIEPA, New Delhi the time-lag in the educational statistics was brought to less than a year at the national level and the *Annual Work Plan & Budget* under the age-sis of *Sarva/Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* was being formulated on current years data both of which have now been forfeited. Other achievements of NIEPA towards strengthening EMIS are also fading and fast becoming history. The year 2021-22 annual plans have recently been formulated based on the outdated 2019-20 data unfortunately which is also the latest data. At the time of writing this note, the process of data collection for 2020-21 is in progress and the moot question is in which year's annual plan, data of 2020-21 will be used. Annual plan exercises are now based on stale data, the allegation which was made on UDISE to gain its control from the national institutions which were also alleged not having expertise. UDISE at NIEPA used to bring out a set of 15 publications in a year all of which has now been discontinued along with the updating of the numerous award-winning internationally acclaimed websites including the *schoolreportcards.in*.

The Present Article

While *how much we gain: A Case of UDISE+ and Is India moving towards privatization of school education: analysis of coverage under UDISE+ 2019-20* has separately been documented,

in this note, we confine to analyze the progress of school enrolment in Grades I to XII over time in general and primary enrolment in Grades I to V and other levels of school education in particular and analyze whether the decline in school enrolment in India is a cause of concern especially when all government-sponsored programmes and RTE 2009 are working towards universal school enrolment? Wherever essential, the same is separately been analyzed under the government as well as private management. Needless to mention that the main source of educational statistics in India, namely UDISE, for different years has been extensively used in analyzing the growth which has taken place in school education in India. Data has been obtained from the official websites and is available in the public domain.

Enrolment Grades I to XII

It may be recalled that DISE became Unified-DISE in 2012-13 when SEMIS was merged into DISE and UDISE got the status of the *official statistics* with effect from the year 2012-13 and all parallel collection of information systems were abandoned and UDISE became the only source of information on school education in India. Given this, the total enrolment consisting of Grades I to XII as well as the number of schools have been presented in Tables 1 & 2 for the period 2012-13 to 2019-20; the year for which UDISE data is latest available i.e. 2019-20.

**Table 1: Enrolment in Grades I to XII, 2012-13 to 2019-20
All India**

Year	Enrolment		
	Total, Grades I to XII	Change over Previous Year	%age Change
2012-13	25,42,75,128	-	
2013-14	25,85,10,656	42,35,528	1.67
2014-15	25,94,70,306	9,59,650	0.37
2015-16	26,05,96,960	11,26,654	0.43
2016-17	25,13,36,317	-92,60,643	-3.55
2017-18	25,09,89,193	-3,47,124	-0.14
2018-19	24,83,38,584	-26,50,609	-1.06
2019-20	25,09,71,683	26,33,099	1.06
Change over 2012-13	-	-33,03,445	-1.30

Source: UDISE, different years.

A glance at the total enrolment at school education level (Grades I to XII) indicates that the same has declined from 254.28 million in the year 2012-13 to 250.97 million in 2019-20 which is lower by 3.30 million in absolute term or -1.30 in percentage terms. However, there are ups and downs in between the period with 260.06 million in 2015-16 being the highest ever enrolment. It may be recalled that enrolment in both the years is obtained from the UDISE with 2012-13 being the first year of the unification of DISE and SEMIS. Further, the number of schools, during the same period increased by 6,940 schools which is 0.46 percent of the total schools in the year 2012-13. Like enrolment, the number of schools covered under UDISE over time also has ups and downs detailed analysis of which can be accessed from the website [Education for All in India](https://educationforallinindia.com) which reveals that the same was declined by more than 42 thousand schools (all schools) as compared to decline by 51 thousand schools in case of schools being run by the Department of Education which apart local bodies, social and tribal welfare, etc is the most prominent type of

management under the government management. Is the decline in total school enrolment (Grades I to XII) in recent years is because of a decline in the corresponding child population i.e. 6 to 18 years for which the official child projected population provided by the *Ministry of Family and Welfare* through the Technical Group on Population Projections, has been analyzed which suggest that the decline in enrolment may not only because of the corresponding child population. Further, it is also pertinent to know whether all levels of school education, such as primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels of education have shown a decline in enrolment during the same period?. For that purpose, enrolment at all these levels has been critically analyzed. But before we analyze the same, total enrolment by management, such as government, private aided & unaided, and other managements have been analyzed during the recent years i.e. 2018-19 and 2019-20. Within enrolment under different managements, enrolment bifurcated by boys and girls has also been analyzed all which presents interesting revelation and may have serious implications for India in achieving SDG goal of 100 percent GER by 2030 in case of school education which also has serious implications for India for its resolution to attain a high 50 percent GER at the higher education level by 2030.

Table 2: Total Schools: I to XII, 2012-13 to 2019-20
All India

Year	Number of Schools		
	Total Schools, Grades I to XII	Change over Previous Year	%age Change
2012-13	15,00,768	-	
2013-14	15,18,160	17,392	1.16
2014-15	15,16,892	-1,268	-0.08
2015-16	15,22,346	5,454	0.36
2016-17	15,35,610	13,264	0.87
2017-18	15,58,903	23,293	1.52
2018-19	15,51,000	-7,903	-0.51
2019-20	15,07,708	-43,292	-2.79
Change over 2012-13		6,940	0.46

Source: UDISE, different years.

Enrolment by Management

Total enrolment in Grades I to XII presented in the Table 3 reveals that government is the main provider as about 52 percent of the total 248.34 million enrolment is located alone under its fold; however the same is much lower than their share in the total number of schools covered under UDISE+ in 2019-20. Further, it is of interest to know that more than 51.16 percent of the total enrolment in 2018-19 were girls as compared to 51.33 percent in the following year contrary to which the percentage in case of the private unaided schools is only 43.52 and 43.67 respectively in 2018-19 and 2019-20; thus confirming the general belief that parents first preference is to send their boy wards to private schools, almost 6 out of 10 students are boys under the private unaided management compared to more than 5 out of 10 girls under the government management but the same is not true for the government-aided managements which has an even lower percentage of girls students which is true for both 2018-19 (48.21 percent) and 2019-20 (48.36 percent).

Table 3: Total Enrolment by Management, Grades I to XII, All India: 2018-19 & 2019-20

	Grade I to XII		
	Boys	Girls	Total
2018-19			
Government	6,28,66,476	6,58,49,893	12,87,16,369
Government Aided	1,42,59,069	1,32,70,953	2,75,30,022
Private Unaided	4,75,16,009	3,66,06,790	8,41,22,799
Others	42,16,038	37,53,356	79,69,394
Total	12,88,57,592	11,94,80,992	24,83,38,584
2019-20			
Government	6,23,61,708	6,57,80,888	12,81,42,596
Government Aided	1,39,51,013	1,30,63,225	2,70,14,238
Private Unaided	5,00,82,790	3,88,30,222	8,89,13,012
Others	36,87,114	32,14,723	69,01,837
Total	13,00,82,625	12,08,89,058	25,09,71,683
Change in Enrolment in 2019-20			
Government	-5,04,768	-69,005	-5,73,773
Government Aided	-3,08,056	-2,07,728	-5,15,784
Private Unaided	25,66,781	22,23,432	47,90,213
Others	-5,28,924	-5,38,633	-10,67,557
Total	12,25,033	14,08,066	26,33,099
Percentage Change in Enrolment			
Government	-0.8	-0.1	-0.4
Government Aided	-2.2	-1.6	-1.9
Private Unaided	5.4	6.1	5.7
Others	-12.5	-14.4	-13.4
Total	1.0	1.2	1.1

Source: UDISE-Plus, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2018-19 data have been downloaded from its portal, and 2019-20 is used from UDISE-plus 2019-20 Report.

Table 4 presents both schools and enrolment under government and private managements during 2018-19 and 2019-20 which reveals that even in one year the share of schools under government managements further declined to 65.1 from 67 percent in the previous year contrary to which the same under private management has increased to 22.4 percent in 2019-20 from 21 percent in the previous year. In addition, the percent share of schools under government-aided management is 5.6 percent and almost 2 percent of the total schools covered under UDISE 2019-20 are unrecognized schools which all show that slowly but for sure the government is losing its tag of the main provider of school education in India. Further, Table 4 reveals that the percentage share of government-managed schools is not reflected in the enrolment as the same is much lower than their share in the total number of schools. For example, as against 65.1 percent share of schools under government management, its corresponding share in enrolment is only 48.6 percent. As against 22.4 percent share in total schools in 2019-20, percentage share of enrolment under private unaided management is as high as 35.4 percent which practically reveals that almost 4 out of every 10 students in India study in schools managed by the private unaided managements which is exclusive to *madrasas* and unrecognized schools. It may further be recalled that the percentage enrolment under government management was 57.3 in 2012-13; the first year of the unification of DISE and SEMIS which has now come down to 49.6 percent in 2019-20. As has already been mentioned that the coverage of schools under government management under

UDISE+ has recently drastically declined which in general belief is due to merger and demerging of schools in response to SATH-E initiated by the NITI Aayog but no details have been made available in the public domain about the criteria which is used in closing down or merging of schools. However, the merging of schools may not be a reason for the decline in enrolment under government-managed schools. A separate study on the decline of school is separately been documented by Arun C Mehta which can be accessed from [Education for All in India](#).

Table 4: Share of Government & Private Managements: Schools & Enrolment 2018-19 & 2019-20

Management	Schools			Enrolment		
	2018-19	2019-20		2018-19	2019-20	
	%age	%age	Number	%age	%age	Number
Government	67.0%	65.1	981146	49.0%	48.6%	121927212
Private Unaided	21.0%	22.4	337499	34.0%	35.4%	88913012
Government Aided	5.0%	5.6	84362	11.0%	10.8%	27014238
Other Government Managements	3.0%	3.4	51424	2.5%	2.5%	6215384
Madrassa	2.0%	1.6	23677	1.0%	1.3%	3183258
Unrecognized	2.0%	2.0	29600	2.0%	1.5%	3718579
Total	15,51,000	100.0	15,07,708	24,43,38,584	100.0%	25,09,71,683

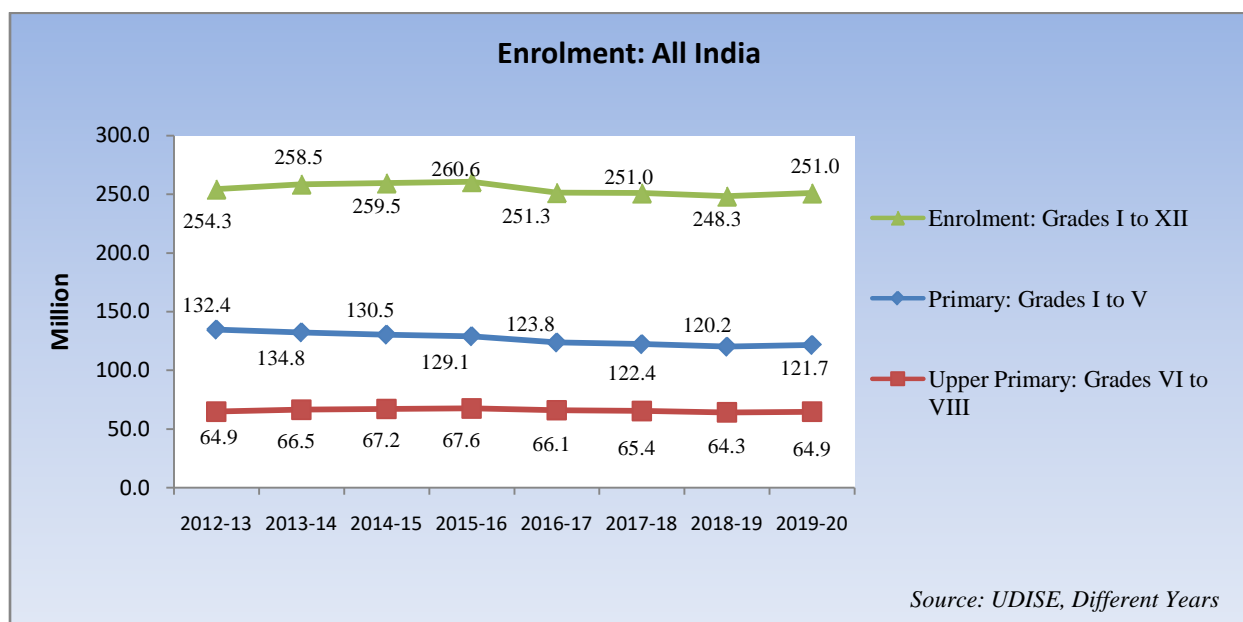
Source: UDISE+ 2018-19 & 2019-20

Before we analyze the percentage share of enrolment by educational level over time, first let us see the pattern of enrolment in recent years at the all-India level which is presented in Table 3. This has become so important because of the statement made by the Ministry of Education at the time of the release of UDISE+ 2019-20 Report indicating that “total enrolment in schools has increased in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19 by 1.6 percent.....total enrolment of all schools in the UDISE+ system have crossed 26.45 crore in 2019-20 which is an increase of more than 42 lakh over the previous year 2018-19” (Page 14, UDISE+ 2019-20 Report). The statement hides more than what it reveals; completely silent on enrolment by managements in general and government and private management in particular which is analyzed in depth in the present article.

Decline in Enrolment

As the decline in the number of schools covered under UDISE+, enrolment distributed by managements reveals that except enrolment under private management, other managements show a significant decline in enrolment under the rest of the management types. Table 3 reveals that total enrolment in the Grades I to XII increased by 2.63 million in 2019-20 which is 1.1 percent more than enrolment in the previous year i.e. 2018-19. However, enrolment distributed by managements indicates that the same except under the private unaided management shows that the same has declined from its previous level which includes both the government as well as government-aided managements. On the one hand, enrolment under government management is declined by 574 thousand (-0.4 percent), on the other hand, enrolment under government-aided management has also shown a decline by more than 516 thousand which is 1.9 percent of

enrolment in the previous year. The increase of 2.63 million in total enrolment in 2019-20 is because of the significant increase in enrolment under the private unaided management which is to the tune of 4.79 million (5.7 percent). It may also be recalled that increase in the total number of schools covered under UDISE+ 2019-20 under private management is to the tune of 11,271 schools which is 3.5 percent of the total such schools in the previous year contrary to which the number of schools covered under the Department of Education declined by 50,382 schools which is 6 percent lower than the same in the previous year. Is the significant increase in enrolment under private unaided management is at the cost of the government management? For which it is pertinent to analyze the pattern of enrolment separately under primary, upper primary, and other levels of school education (Table 5).



The bifurcation of enrolment by gender further shows that both boys (87.97 percent under Department of Education), as well as girls (12.03 percent) enrolment, has declined under all managements except the private unaided management further indicating that majority of the decline is because of the significant decline in boys enrolment but the share of girls in decline under the aided management is as high as 40 percent (Table 3). On the other hand, of the total increase of 4.79 million enrolment under private unaided management, 2.22 million (53.58 percent) is contributed by boys and the rest, 46.42 percent by girls. Because of the significant increase in enrolment under private unaided management, the overall enrolment in 2019-20 shows an increasing trend which otherwise indicates an overall decrease across all other management types in 2019-20. Boys (53.58 percent) and girls (46.42 percent) enrolment under private unaided management respectively increased by 5.4 and 6.1 percent over the previous year. It may be recalled that the size of enrolment under private unaided management is to the tune of 88.91 million of the total 250.97 million enrolment; thus indicating that on an average for almost every three students, one is located in the private unaided management to which if enrolment in private aided schools is added the same indicate that one in almost two students are located in private schools. UDISE+ 2019-20 data as mentioned above indicate a significant increase in coverage of private unaided schools by more than 50 thousand which is encouraging which otherwise means that the UDISE+ data in the previous year was a gross underestimate of

such schools? Because of SATH-E, the coverage of government schools is further likely to be declined in 2020-21 but because of the COVID 2019, one can expect huge migration of students from private to government-managed schools.

Enrolment by Levels of Education

Tables 5, 6, and 7 present enrolment at primary and upper primary levels as well as the combined elementary level of education which is also presented separately under the government and private managements and their share in the total enrolment. Total elementary enrolment consisting Grades I to VIII indicate that the same has increased from 168.29 million in 2005-06 to 186.56 million in 2019-20 but there are sharp up and down in between the period with 199.71 million in 2012-13 is the highest enrolment at this level of education. It may be recalled that 2005-06 was the first year of DISE when the entire country got covered under DISE for the first time maybe because of which in the initial period the coverage was not complete. Similarly, the year 2012-13 in which elementary level of education have had the highest ever enrolment was as mentioned above was the first year of the unification of DISE and SEMIS when for the first time by using single Data Capture Format data from all the levels of school education was collected during which many of the uncovered, especially secondary and higher secondary schools were covered for the first time. However, the momentum couldn't be maintained in the following years with 184.50 million in 2018-19 being the lowest ever enrolment during the period 2012-13 to 2019-20. A look at the percentage share of enrolment at the elementary level to the total school education enrolment (Table 6) further reveals that the same has declined to 74.29 percent in 2018-19 from 78.54 percent in 2012-13 incidentally which is the highest during the period 2012-13 to 2019-20. Further, it has been observed that the share of primary to total enrolment in Grades I to XII declined to 48.5 percent in 2019-20 from a high of 53 percent in 2005-06. Though a bit up and down in the recent past, the share of upper primary to total enrolment almost remain stagnant at around 25 percent (65 million). Even though enrolment at the elementary level of education declined both in absolute and percentage terms, a declining share of primary enrolment both in the percentage and absolute terms over time is a cause of concern and which as mentioned above is a serious dent towards efforts being made in India towards achieving SDG targets of 100 percent GER by 2030. But the moot question is why is school enrolment showing a declining trend? Is it because of a decline in the corresponding child population which resulted in a decline in enrolment at the primary level of education? To examine it, further trends in primary, as well as upper primary enrolment during the same period, have also been analyzed which is presented in Tables 5 & 6.

Enrolment by levels of education presented in Table 5 indicates that both primary, as well as upper primary enrolment, reveal inconsistent trends during the period 2005-06 to 2019-20; however upper primary enrolment is a bit less erratic than primary enrolment. All through the period, upper primary enrolment has increased from 43.67 million in 2005-06 to 67.59 million in 2015-16 but like primary enrolment, the same declined to 66.08 million in the following year i.e. 2016-17, 65.44 million in 2017-18, further to 64.27 million in 2018-19 but improve to 64.87 million in 2019-20. As it seems that the decline in primary enrolment starting in the year 2012-13 has an impact on upper primary enrolment which had also started declining in 2016-17. It may be observed that both primary, as well as upper primary enrolment, declined significantly in

2016-17, incidentally, the year during which student data collection in-sync with UDISE was initiated and it was planned to generate enrolment tables based on individual student date of

Table 5: Enrolment by Levels of Education: 2005-06 to 2019-20 (In Million)

Year	Enrolment								
	I-V			VI-VIII			I-VIII		
	Total	Government Management	Private Management	Total	Government Management	Private Management	Total	Government	Private
2005-06	124.62	-	-	43.67	-	-	168.29	-	-
2006-07	131.85	-	-	47.49	-	-	179.34	-	-
2007-08	134.13	101.15	32.74	50.91	32.50	18.36	185.04	133.65	51.10
2008-09	134.38	99.49	34.84	53.35	33.72	19.61	187.73	133.21	54.45
2009-10	133.41	96.22	37.10	54.47	34.37	20.06	187.88	130.59	57.16
2010-11	135.21	94.09	38.24	57.84	36.00	20.88	193.05	130.09	59.12
2011-12	137.10	91.65	41.90	61.96	37.75	22.97	199.06	129.40	64.87
2012-13	134.78	86.49	44.48	64.93	38.57	25.27	199.71	125.06	69.75
2013-14	132.43	83.12	45.67	66.47	38.84	25.57	198.90	121.96	71.24
2014-15	130.50	79.95	46.63	67.17	39.02	26.93	197.67	118.97	73.56
2015-16	129.12	78.05	47.19	67.59	38.87	27.46	196.71	116.92	74.65
2016-17	123.81	73.65	45.98	66.08	37.66	27.18	189.89	111.31	73.16
2017-18	122.38	69.34	47.50	65.44	36.49	27.34	187.82	105.83	74.84
2018-19	120.23	67.54	47.31	64.27	35.13	27.50	184.50	102.67	74.81
2019-20	121.69	66.78	49.77	64.87	34.91	28.60	186.56	101.69	78.37

Source: UDISE, different years. The total may not match because of unrecognized schools which are not added to private management.

Table 6: Share of Enrolment by Levels of Education: 2005-06 to 2019-20 (In Million)

Year	Enrolment						
	Total Grades I to XII	Primary Grades I to V	%age	Upper Primary Grades VI to VIII	%age	Elementary Grades I to VIII	%age
2012-13	254.28	134.78	53.0	64.93	25.54	199.71	78.54
2013-14	258.51	132.43	51.2	66.47	25.71	198.90	76.94
2014-15	259.47	130.50	50.3	67.17	25.89	197.67	76.18
2015-16	260.60	129.12	49.5	67.59	25.94	196.71	75.48
2016-17	251.34	123.81	49.3	66.08	26.29	189.89	75.55
2017-18	250.99	122.38	48.8	65.44	26.07	187.82	74.83
2018-19	248.34	120.23	48.4	64.27	25.88	184.50	74.29
2019-20	250.97	121.69	48.5	64.87	25.85	186.56	74.34

Source: UDISE, different years.

birth, mother and fathers name and other such unique variables specific to a student because of which it is not an easy task to report unrealistic figures. The declining trend beginning 2016-17 in both primary and upper primary enrolment continued up to 2018-19 but again increased in the following year i.e. 2019-20; the year in which the number of schools covered under UDISE+ declined by more than 42 thousand? What were the special efforts made during the year which resulted in the increase in enrolment in 2019-20? Will this trend continue in 2020-21 which is most likely to be reversed because of the COVID 2019 but at the same time, enrolment under government management may see an increase because of the migration from private to government schools which is also reflected in ASER 2021 report of which was released recently.

It may be recalled that Delhi recently reported migration of about 300 thousand students from private to government schools. The trend may also be reflected in other states which must be seen as an opportunity and the state must ensure that it is capable of handling a sudden influx of students under its umbrella and make efforts to ensure that they do not migrate back to private schools when situation concerning COVID improve and normalcy returns to pre-COVID period. School education may further be affected given the occurrence of new COVID variants and the situation is not likely to be improved soon.

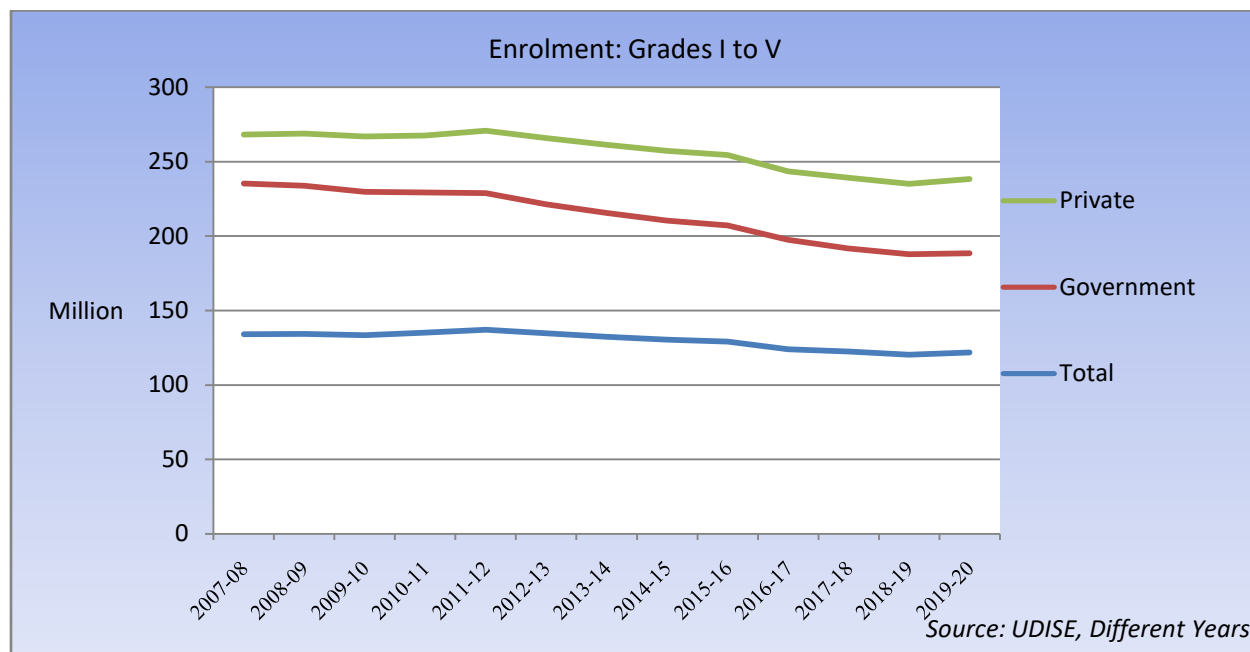
**Table 7: Change in Primary Enrolment over the Previous year
2005-06 to 2019-20**

Year	Enrolment in Grades I-V (In Million)					Change over Previous Year
	Total	Change over Previous Year	Government	Change over Previous Year	Private	
2005-06	124.62	-	-	-	-	-
2006-07	131.85	7.23	-	-	-	-
2007-08	134.13	2.28	101.15	-	32.74	-
2008-09	134.38	0.25	99.49	-1.66	34.84	2.10
2009-10	133.41	-0.97	96.22	-3.27	37.10	2.26
2010-11	135.21	1.80	94.09	-2.13	38.24	1.14
2011-12	137.10	1.89	91.65	-2.44	41.90	3.66
2012-13	134.78	-2.32	86.49	-5.16	44.48	2.58
2013-14	132.43	-2.35	83.12	-3.37	45.67	1.19
2014-15	130.50	-1.93	79.95	-3.17	46.63	0.96
2015-16	129.12	-1.38	78.05	-1.90	47.19	0.56
2016-17	123.81	-5.31	73.65	-4.40	45.98	-1.21
2017-18	122.38	-1.43	69.34	-4.31	47.50	1.52
2018-19	120.23	-2.15	67.54	-1.80	47.31	-0.19
2019-20	121.69	1.46	66.78	-0.76	49.77	2.46

Source: UDISE, different years. The total may not match because of unrecognized schools which are not added to private management.

Further, Table 8 presents the percent share of enrolment under government and private managements separately at the primary and upper primary levels of education all of which indicate a consistent decline in percentage share of enrolment under government management all through the years 2007-08 to 2019-20; definitely which is because of the consistent and significant increase in enrolment under private managements during the same period. Table 4 presented above also indicates that the share of government schools to total schools also declined significantly during the corresponding period; thus indicating more coverage of private schools. It may be observed that at one point in time, the share of government enrolment in total elementary enrolment: Grades I to VIII was as high as 72.23 percent in 2007-08 which in 2019-20 has come down to 54.51 percent; quite a similar trend is observed separately in case of primary as well as upper primary enrolment. At one point in time, especially in the initial period, centrally sponsored schemes ensure more and more enrolment in government schools but later the momentum couldn't be sustained which is reflected in a consistent increase in private enrolment. Initially, centrally sponsored schemes have had a focus on enrolment drives which was later shifted on retention and further to the quality of education. Table 9 presents the change

in enrolment in 2019-20 over the previous year which is presented by management and also separately in the case of government and private managements.



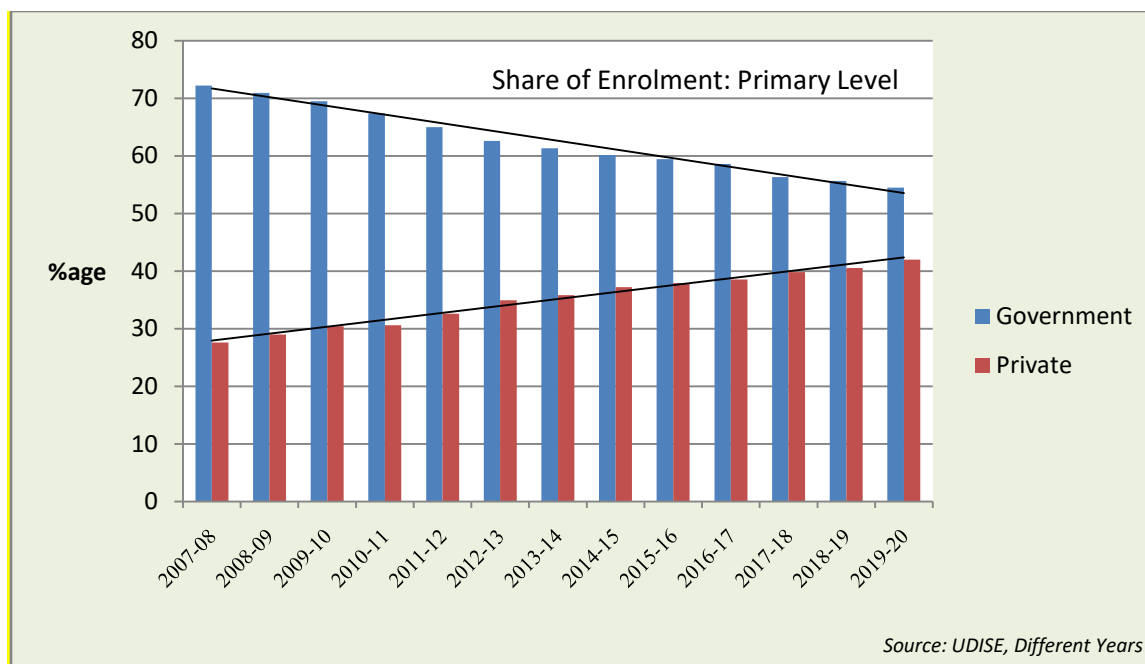
**Table 8: Percent Share of Enrolment by Levels of Education & Management
2005-06 to 2019-20**

Year	Primary: Grades I – V		Upper Primary: Grades VI-VIII		Elementary: Grades I-VIII	
	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private
2007-08	75.41	24.41	63.84	36.06	72.23	27.62
2008-09	74.04	25.93	63.21	36.76	70.96	29.00
2009-10	72.12	27.81	63.10	36.83	69.51	30.42
2010-11	69.59	28.28	62.24	36.10	67.39	30.62
2011-12	66.85	30.56	60.93	37.07	65.01	32.59
2012-13	64.17	33.00	59.40	38.92	62.62	34.93
2013-14	62.77	34.49	58.43	38.47	61.32	35.82
2014-15	61.26	35.73	58.09	40.09	60.19	37.21
2015-16	60.45	36.55	57.51	40.63	59.44	37.95
2016-17	59.49	37.14	56.99	41.13	58.62	38.53
2017-18	56.66	38.81	55.76	41.78	56.35	39.85
2018-19	56.18	39.35	54.66	42.79	55.65	40.55
2019-20	54.88	40.90	53.82	44.09	54.51	42.01

Source: UDISE, different years. The total may not add to hundred because of unrecognized schools which are not added to private management.

Elementary Level

Table 9 reveals that enrolment irrespective of primary, upper primary, and combined elementary level of education, both under the government as well as government-aided managements have



shown a decline in 2019-20 over the previous year i.e. 2018-19 which is also true separately for boys and girls enrolment. Contrary to which both boys and girls enrolment under the private unaided management significantly increased at all levels of school education. Enrolment under other managements has also shown a decline during the same period. The UDISE+ 2019-20 report indicates an overall increase is true to the sense that total elementary enrolment is increased by 2.06 million but at the same time enrolment under the government and aided managements is declined to the tune of 1.28 million and another 504 thousand declined under the other managements which makes a total decline by 1.78 million. It is the private unaided management under which enrolment is increased by a whopping 3.85 million because of which overall elementary enrolment is shown to be increased by 2.06 million in 2019-20. Last year i.e. 2018-19, the same was declined by 3.32 million of which more than 95 percent was contributed by the enrolment under government management. It may also be recalled that not only the total schools covered under the UDISE+ 2019-20 has declined (about 43 thousand) but the same under the Department of Education alone is to the tune of more than 50 thousand schools. Further, it has been observed that decline is more due to boys than their counterparts girls which is true for primary, upper primary, and elementary levels but the increase in enrolment under private unaided management, boys outnumbered their girls' counterpart. Of the total 2.85 million increase in elementary level enrolment under private unaided management, the contribution of girls is about 47 percent which is also true separately for primary and upper primary enrolment. In percentage terms, total enrolment in the elementary level is increased by 1.12 percent against 1.21 percent at primary and 0.94 percent at the upper primary level of education. It is interesting to observe that contribution of girls in terms of percentage increase is higher than boys counterparts and is true for both primary and upper primary levels of education.

**Table 9: Change in Enrolment in 2019-20 over 2018-19, All India
Elementary Level**

Management	Primary			Upper Primary			Elementary		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Change in Enrolment									
Govt.	-4,24,087	-3,40,643	-7,64,730	-1,82,203	-42,021	-2,24,224	-6,06,290	-3,82,664	-9,88,954
Govt. Aided	-71,535	-60,161	-1,31,696	-92,567	-66,344	-1,58,911	-1,64,102	-1,26,505	-2,90,607
Private unaided	13,83,102	12,02,399	25,85,501	6,73,188	5,87,523	12,60,711	20,56,290	17,89,922	38,46,212
Others	-1,44,857	-87,685	-2,32,542	-1,29,934	-1,41,281	-2,71,215	-2,74,791	-2,28,966	-5,03,757
Total	7,42,623	7,13,910	14,56,533	2,68,484	3,37,877	6,06,361	10,11,107	10,51,787	20,62,894
%age Change									
Govt.	-1.27	-0.99	-1.13	-1.07	-0.23	-0.64	-1.20	-0.73	-0.96
Govt. Aided	-2.47	-2.12	-2.30	-2.27	-1.72	-2.00	-2.35	-1.89	-2.13
Private unaided	5.91	6.61	6.22	6.01	7.01	6.44	5.94	6.74	6.29
Others	-4.95	-3.58	-4.33	-15.35	-17.82	-16.54	-7.28	-7.06	-7.18
Total	1.19	1.24	1.21	0.81	1.09	0.94	1.06	1.18	1.12

Source: UDISE+ 2018-19 and 2019-20

Secondary Level

The huge decline in enrolment in the recent past has started showing its impact on the secondary level of education which is presented in Table 10 revealing that barring private unaided management, the rest of the management type (except boys in case of government) have shown a decline in 2019-20 over the previous year. The total secondary enrolment (Grades IX & X) however is increased by 130 thousand which is 0.3 percent of the same in the previous year. During the same year, private unaided management increased by a hoping 465 thousand (3.6 percent) as against a decline by 146 and 231 thousand respectively under the government and other managements which is -1.8 and -44.1 percent of their respective enrolment in the previous year. An increase of 130 thousand in secondary enrolment in 2019-20 is almost equally contributed by boys and girls. Overall secondary enrolment in 2019-20 is reported to be 38.46 million as against 38.33 million in the previous year which is 130 thousand (0.30 percent) more than the previous year. Further, secondary enrolment under the government management indicates that the same in case of boys is declined by more than 18 thousand which is -0.2 percent of the total enrolment in the previous year against which girls enrolment is increased by more than 59 thousand (0.70 percent). Of the total, 146 thousand enrolment declined under government-aided management, about 55 percent is contributed by boys and the rest 45 percent by girls. On the other hand, enrolment under other managements is declined by 231 thousand in absolute or -44.1 in percentage term. If the decline in enrolment at the elementary level of education is not checked, the secondary level can see a fall in enrolment in coming years; thus severely affecting efforts being made towards achieving a GER of 100 percent by 2030 under SDG.

Higher Secondary Level

Further, it is observed that not only that enrolment under the private unaided managements has increased impressively in the case of elementary and secondary level of education but the same

is also true in the case of higher secondary level. Table 11 further reveals that the majority increase in enrolment at this level is contributed by the private unaided managements. Unlike, other levels of education, higher secondary enrolment under the government management is increased by 374 thousand the majority of which about 68 percent is contributed by the girls is termed impressive. However, the same under the government aided and other managements has shown a decline which is in the tune of 79 thousand (-1.3 percent) and 333 thousand (-77.4 percent) respectively. A huge decline in percentage term in the case of other managements is a cause of concern which is true for both secondary and higher secondary levels of education but the UDISE+ 2019-20 report is silent on it.

**Table 10: Change in Enrolment in 2019-20 over 2018-19, All India
Secondary Level**

Year	Secondary		
	Boys	Girls	Total
2018-19			
Government	82,14,637	87,78,029	1,69,92,666
Government Aided	41,92,987	37,31,556	79,24,543
Private unaided	73,57,116	55,36,321	1,28,93,437
Others	2,42,007	2,81,918	5,23,925
Total	2,00,06,747	1,83,27,824	3,83,34,571
2019-20			
Government	81,96,448	88,37,395	1,70,33,843
Government Aided	41,13,365	36,65,516	77,78,881
Private unaided	76,19,886	57,38,914	1,33,58,800
Others	1,42,657	1,50,252	2,92,909
Total	2,00,72,356	1,83,92,077	3,84,64,433
Change in Enrolment			
Government	-18,189	59,366	41,177
Government Aided	-79,622	-66,040	-1,45,662
Private unaided	2,62,770	2,02,593	4,65,363
Others	-99,350	-1,31,666	-2,31,016
Total	65,609	64,253	1,29,862
%age Change			
Government	-0.2	0.7	0.2
Government Aided	-1.9	-1.8	-1.8
Private unaided	3.6	3.7	3.6
Others	-41.1	-46.7	-44.1
Total	0.3	0.4	0.3

Source: Same as Table 3.

**Table 11: Change in Enrolment in 2019-20 over 2018-19, All India
Higher Secondary Level**

Year	Higher Secondary		
	Boys	Girls	Total
2018-19			
Government	43,22,979	47,29,548	90,52,527
Government Aided	30,91,157	28,56,891	59,48,048
Private Unaided	55,67,446	45,09,026	1,00,76,472
Others	2,01,050	2,28,720	4,29,770
Total	1,31,82,632	1,23,24,185	2,55,06,817
2019-20			
Government	44,42,690	49,83,841	94,26,531
Government Aided	30,26,825	28,41,708	58,68,533
Private Unaided	58,15,167	47,39,943	1,05,55,110
Others	46,267	50,719	96,986
Total	1,33,30,949	1,26,16,211	2,59,47,160
Change in Enrolment			
Government	1,19,711	2,54,293	3,74,004
Government Aided	-64,332	-15,183	-79,515
Private unaided	2,47,721	2,30,917	4,78,638
Others	-1,54,783	-1,78,001	-3,32,784
Total	1,48,317	2,92,026	4,40,343
%age Change			
Government	2.8	5.4	4.1
Government Aided	-2.1	-0.5	-1.3
Private unaided	4.4	5.1	4.8
Others	-77.0	-77.8	-77.4
Total	1.1	2.4	1.7

Source: Same as Table 3.

Concluding Observations

A cursory look at enrolment at the primary level of education indicates that it is much more erratic than the same in the case of other levels which has serious implications for other levels of education to grow and move towards the goal of universal enrolment by 2030 as envisaged in SDG4. Can enrolment be so erratic on year to year basis? What are the causes behind it? Is enrolment data in India even though improved is not yet reliable? Or there is a tendency to play with the variables which can get more funds? Or even fetch high ranking in indices being computed these days? Sudden ups and downs in enrolment at the primary level suggest that the quality of enrolment statistics in India has still a lot more scope to further improve. State-wise enrolment suggests that in the recent past a few states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, etc. experienced a significant decline in a year followed which the same has again shown increased the very next year all which raises serious doubt about the quality and reliability of enrolment statistics. At one point in time, in one of the states, the decline in a year was of the tune of about a million. Interesting point is that nobody (researchers, policymakers, planners, data managers, etc.) is raising the alarm and it has become a routine to see ups and downs in the enrollment which otherwise must have a serious cause of

concern. No serious implications of erratic enrolment are visible in the public domain and year after year the state as well as district annual work plans are being appraised (?) and approved by the Project Approval Board. If the enrolment in a year is lower than the same in the previous year the same has serious cost implications on mid-day meal, free distribution of textbooks and uniforms, and other such student-based incentives as well as implications on the number of teachers a school gets especially when the decline in enrolment in a year is in millions. Bifurcation of enrolment by management reveals more interesting observations as the sizable decline is because of the decline in enrolment under the government & aided managements.

**Table 12: Projected Child Population
2011 to 2021, All India**

(Figures in thousand)

Age/Age-Group	Year			Average Annual Growth Rate (%) 2011 to 2021
	2011	2016	2021	
Age-6	24,913	23,494	23,494	-0.58
6 to 10+	1,26,307	1,19,353	1,17,842	-0.69
11 to 13+	77,731	75,042	70,550	-0.96
14 to 15+	50,315	50,801	48,425	-0.38
16 to 17+	49,162	51,694	49,647	0.10
Total	4,65,944	4,68,859	4,62,217	-0.08

Source: Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections, National Commission on Population, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, July 2020. The growth rate has been calculated by the author.

Enrolment at the primary, upper primary and elementary levels of education by management reveals that once the primary enrolment was high to the tune of 137.10 million in 2011-12 and the lowest, 120.23 million in 2018-19. In the latest year i.e. 2019-20, the same has again increased to 121.69 million from its level in the previous year. There are many ups and downs during the entire period from 2005-06 to 2019-20 because of which enrolment at the primary level in India can simply be termed as inconsistent because of which one can easily understand the outcome of planning exercises being carried out annually under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* previously and *Samagra Shiksha* at present. The time-lag in educational statistics has again shown an increasing trend after the management of UDISE shifted to the Ministry of education from 2018-19 onwards. As of November 2021, the UDISE+ data is the latest available for 2019-20, and the same was recently used in formulating the 2021-22 annual work plan. The mute question is in which year's annual plan UDISE+ 2020-21 and 2021-22 data will be used. Fast we are returning to the point when annual plans were used to formulate based on stale data but later joint efforts made by the NIEPA, Ministry of Education/HRD, and UNICEF, the time-lag in educational statistics were drastically reduced, and annual plans started formulating based on the current year's data. In the year 2016-17, primary level enrolment declined to 123.81 million from 129.12 million in the previous year; thus showing a decline by 5.31 million which is 4.11 percent of enrolment in 2015-16 incidentally which is the highest ever decline all through the period. Is the sharp decline in enrolment over the years simply be termed as because of the decline in the corresponding child population but the amount of decline in enrolment does not suggest that the same may not only be the reason of decline as the projected child population has not declined by that amount (see Table 12). Further, it has been observed that about 83 percent of the total

decline in primary enrolment in 2016-17 is contributed by the government management which is also true for the rest of the years. On the one hand, enrolment under the government management has consistently declined all through the period, on the other hand, the same under the private management has shown a consistently increasing trend. A cursory look at the primary enrolment one gets the impression that there is perfect negative correction between the enrolment under the government and private managements. Is the enrolment under private management is increasing at the cost of the government management?; the available data suggest this argument. By and large, government schools are left for the wards of the economically poor section of society. Unless the efficiency and quality of the primary level of education is improved to a significant effect, the trend of decline in enrolment under the government management is not likely to be reversed. Even the poorest of the poor parents desire that their wards get quality education which he presumes is possible only through private schooling. However, because of the COVID, enrolment under the government management may see migration from private schools which must see as an opportunity and all possible efforts be made to ensure that they do not return to private schooling for which government must ensure that funding to education is not cut, scholarships to students is not further delayed and released without delay, and schools are provided not only mid-day meal kits but also release the cooking cost.

The author of this note is well aware of the issues concerning the quality of enrolment data which over time has improved but not to the satisfaction because of which a lot of efforts were made to further improve the quality of data amongst which 5 percent sample checking of data by the third party agency was one of the important initiatives but couldn't sustain because of the lack of funds. Another important initiative was to create a culture of transparency, sharing, and dissemination of data by displaying school report cards at the prominent location in school, the orientation of respondents through EDUSAT, etc but all of which couldn't furnish the desired results. In addition, a separate component was added to off-line UDISE software to check the consistency of the information supplied by the schools, and a certificate issued by the State Project Director indicating that the data is free from errors and inconsistencies was also made mandatory all of which was still not enough to ensure that enrolment data is free from inconsistencies.

National Level Student-wise Database being created for all schools from Class I to XII

Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) managed by NIEPA, is the major source of data on all the parameters of education covering all its pillars viz., School, Teacher and Student. As an integral part of the U-DISE, the *Department of School Education & Literacy* has initiated SDMIS in 2016-17 to collect child-wise data with Aadhar ID. Every student is provided a Unique Student ID generated through the system which would lead to the creation of a National level student-wise database giving full details of all students in all Government, Aided and Private schools from standard I to standard XII. This would also help to track all the students throughout the school-cycle.

Upendra Kushwaha, Minister of State (HRD), Lok Sabha Question. 12th March 2018, PIB Delhi

If the enrolment which is the foundation of plan formulation is not reliable or the computation of the SEQI, PGI, SDG and other such indices which are largely based on enrollment-based indicators has little meaning. Even though there is a provision to authenticate data at each level but still there is no mechanism to check whether, for example, enrolment in Grade I of age 6 reported to be 35 by a school is correct? Aggregate enrolment distributed by mediums of instruction, social category, and age is being collected under UDISE which mostly doesn't match well with the total enrolment. Aggregate enrolment, if generated by using the date-of-birth and other such parameters of an individual student may help in improving the quality and consistency of enrolment data may be the only way out.

Is declining school enrolment a cause of concern in India, the answer is yes and there is no option but to further improve the quality, consistency, and reliability of enrolment data transparently.

The Way Forward

In the light of the concerns raised above, the Government of India had decided to collect detailed student data on 35 parameters in-sync with UDISE from the year 2016-17 (*see Box*).

Student name, mother's & father's names, social category, class in which studies, incentives received, repetition, *Aadhaar* number, date of birth, gender, etc. were some of the variables on which information about each student was envisaged to collect. Initially, off-line UDISE and student data collection were planned to go parallel. Ultimately, all UDISE enrolment tables were planned to be generated based on student data so collected, which includes: enrolment by castes, age, mediums of instruction, religion, streams, trade, and sector (vocational education), CWSN enrolment, repeaters, incentives, etc. For this purpose, one rupee per student was sanctioned to states. In addition, 100 thousand rupees per district were provided to augment internet and up to Rs. 1 million for servers at the state level. A detailed roadmap for the successful implementation of student data collection was prepared and provided users a variety of options for data entry which included:

- A complete online application;
- Bulk uploading through specially designed EXCEL Template which had provision for off-line validation;
- An independent application, through which data could be entered in off-line mode from schools which doesn't require back and front-end software; and
- A component on student data was also added to the then off-line UDISE software which was installed in all the districts of the Country to which users were familiar.

In addition, uploading of previously available state-specific student data on the portal was facilitated. To acquaint district and state MIS officers, technical workshops were conducted. Salient features of *Roadmap* were as follows:

- Initially, UDISE in its existing form would continue until successful implementation of student-wise information collection;
- Data shall be collected from all schools irrespective of the School Category, School Management, School Type, and School Location. *Madarsas* were also supposed to be covered;
- When data-entry of student data is over, a consolidated statement consisting of class-wise details of each child, as per Student-DCF will be generated and sent to schools through CRC Coordinator;
- Next year, new entrants in Grade I only would be required to be collected, etc.

It is heartening to note that students records of more than 210 million students majority with *Aadhaar* numbers were uploaded to the National Portal which was by all means encouraging. However, the online portal could be fully used in Chandigarh in the true sense but the outcome of such a massive exercise is reflected in enrolment data of 2016-17 which as reported to be declined by more than 5 million which is incidentally the highest ever decline in enrolment at the primary level of education. The mammoth exercise was however discontinued in the following year but a host of states continued despite the same is not mandatory. Had it not been discontinued, India would have by now a full-fledged child tracking system which eventually would have improved the quality of enrolment data to a significant effect. The system so developed could have tackled instances of dual and fake enrolment, if any resulting in inflated enrolment. In addition, it would have also helped in tracking children affected by migration as well as dropped out children. Therefore to improve the quality of educational data in general and enrolment in particular, possibilities should now be explored to revamp the student data collection as a part of online-UDISE+. The Draft NEP 2019 (*Para 6.1.5*) also suggested '*up to date information for each student will be maintained in the National Repository of Educational Data*' which is quite possible as UDISE+ is now said to be an online system. In addition, about 14 states still maintain the collection of student data as a part of their state-specific initiative. Hopefully, the *National Digital Education Architecture* (NDEAR) of the *Department of School Education and Literacy*, Ministry of Education will take care of it.