



An analytical study on the Kerala model for school reform

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Abstract

The 'Kerala Model of Development,' which broadly encompasses the state of Kerala and its numerous illustrious accomplishments in the areas of education, health, habitat, land reforms, etc., has gained international renown as an exceptionally progressive region of India. With an index score of 0.709 across all three measures of human development—health, education, and income—with and without inequality adjustment, Kerala stands alone among the nation's states. There is a close relationship between the three indicators of social development—the index of education, health, and per capita income. A higher standard of living is a direct result of improved health care and educational opportunities. Kerala is actively working to achieve international standards in higher education, technical education, and research, and it is already well ahead of the national objectives in primary and secondary education. Contrary to its previous plans, the Twelfth Plan calls on the private sector to build better and bigger institutions. Additionally, it pledges to support innovative Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models in the academic sector. Sustainable human development can be achieved via early simulation, comprehensive interventions in nutrition, health, and sanitation, as shown in the Kerala model. In order to reach SDG4, member states are expected to allocate 4-6% of their GDP to education, according to the Incheon Declaration. This proclamation includes India as a signatory. Education and health care in Kerala are on par with Western standards, which sets it apart from the rest of India and other low-income nations. More people at all socioeconomic levels have access to education and a bigger voice in government in Kerala than in any other Indian state, and women in general have it far better than in the rest of India.

Keywords: Kerala model of development, school reform in India, sustainable educational policy, human development index (HDI)

Introduction

Article 26(1) and (2) of the United Nations General Assembly's Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) make it crystal clear that everyone has the right to an education, and that education should strive for holistic development that leads to respect for basic freedoms and human rights. More than 100 million children are removed from the educational system before finishing elementary education, and 58 million children remain unschooled worldwide, even seven decades after the UDHR. In terms of the percentage of children that do not attend school, India ranks first. A staggering 84 million youngsters do not attend school at all, with 47 million dropping out before completing the tenth grade, according to the 2011 Census. So that its citizens don't fall behind in the rate of enlightenment and so that they can all benefit from education and grow into better citizens and public workers, the state should pay for all of their schooling. The statement above does not originate from any UN proclamation or the budget address of a "welfare" state's finance minister. Rani Gouri Parvati Bai, regent queen of Travancore, wrote this in 1817 and included it in Kerala's royal rescript. The economics of education discourse has swung between education cess and defraying education for the past two centuries. Education was declared to be the "responsibility" of the state in the historic royal rescript of 1817. At the same time, it stressed that when deciding how much money to spend on schools, "political will" is more crucial than electoral politics.

When it comes to the state's political economy, education—with all its idealistic roots—is moulded. The question then becomes whether the ideological regime that ran and won office on a platform of nationalism and nation-first, which

takes into account the importance of "right" education in nation-building, cannot accommodate the demands of a liberal economic system. The New Education Policy, 2020 was shaped by a political and philosophical framework focused on nationalism and ethnic and religious nationalism. Oddly enough, the administration of a democratic welfare state is unable to realize the NEP it has created, in contrast to the princely state of Travancore in colonial India, which could understand the validity of publicly funded mass education.

Kerala Model Development in Education

The 'Kerala Model of Development,' which broadly encompasses the state of Kerala and its numerous illustrious accomplishments in the areas of education, health, habitat, land reforms, etc., has gained international renown as an exceptionally progressive region of India. According to Ratcliffe (1978), Amin (1991), Frank and Chasin (1994), and others, the Kerala model is characterized by a low per capita income that is just one-eighth that of the US residents, while maintaining a high level of living equivalent to that of the US or Europe. The exceptional results that Kerala has achieved in the fields of education and health contribute significantly to the distinctiveness of the Kerala model of development. Attaining universal literacy has never been easier than in Kerala. In this regard, Kerala is often compared to both other developing nations and other Indian states, as well as to a few developed nations. Not only is the education sector one of the largest employers in the state, but it also contributes almost one third of the total revenue expenditures of the state. In the eleventh five-year plan, the education sector had a budget of 1,257,000,000,000 Indian rupees.

Total 1: Of Schools in Kerala

Category of Schools	LP Schools	UP Schools	High Schools	Higher Sec. Schools	Technical Schools	Voc. Higher Sec. Schools	Total
Govt.	2,593	873	1228	857	39	261	5683
Aided	3,881	1864	1432	846	-	128	8082
Unaided	316	251	477	362	-	-	1476
TOTAL	6,790	2,988	3137	2065	39	389	15,369

Total 2: Of Students Enrolled in Kerala during the 2025-26 Academic Year (Class 1 to Class 12)

Category of Schools	LP Schools	UP Schools	High Schools	HS Schools	VHSS	Total Enrolments Class 1-12
Govt.	3,76,436	306,283	411,575	3,055	351,873	1446167
Aided	6,36,576	682,249	748,870	-	373,900	2441595
Unaided	1,74,505	105,540	92,668	-	45,222	417935
Total	11,87,517	1,094,072	1,253,113	3,055	770,995	4305697

With a 100% enrolment rate in elementary and secondary schools, Kerala boasts the nation's highest literacy rate. The student-teacher ratio and student-school ratio show an ideal situation with approximately 46 lakh students, 16,000 schools, and 1.69 lakh teachers. As a result of Athulyam's adult education program and its more than 20,000 non-teaching staff, primary education was made universal in Kerala. Teachers were not overburdened with administrative or non-teaching duties. Successive administrations should make education a top priority if they want to accomplish this universalization. The then-Left Front government's 1989 complete literacy effort finally came to conclusion with this. A massive 2.35 lakh students made the transition from private to public schools after PRISM (Promoting Regional Schools to International Standards through Multiple Interventions) was successfully implemented and massive allocations were made to develop one school in each assembly segment to international standards. Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate, has penned a voluminous work on what he calls the "Kerala Model" of education. Sen ascribes the social and economic prosperity of Kerala to the state's long-term commitment to expanding access to formal education through a steady stream of government initiatives. All of the state's rural schools now have access to state-of-the-art educational facilities, thanks to the state government. People living in poverty are the ones who really gain from the general education sector. Government programs have ensured that all pupils in the state, regardless of their home town, would have access to an excellent education. For this reason, the government created a revitalization mission to safeguard public schools and the kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. The number of students enrolling in public schools has recently increased. Additionally, the mind-set of the younger generation towards Kerala's future and the basis of school instruction have both undergone favourable changes. Because of the high-quality education they will receive in public schools, they will be exceptionally talented and skilled in the future. Student achievement in the classroom has been consistently high over the past five years are able to focus on their teaching responsibilities without interruption. In addition to an additional flagship

Level of Literacy Based on the 2011 Census

The literacy rate in Kerala was 93.91% in the 2011 census. The literacy rate of Kerala is 96.02 percent for males and 91.98 percent for women, compared to 82.14% for men and 65.46 percent for women for all of India. Literacy rates in Pathanamthitta and Kottayam are 96.5% and 97.2%, respectively, among the districts in Kerala. Palakkad has the

lowest literacy rate at 89.3 percent, while Wayanad has the lowest at 89%. The literacy rate in Wayanad, even at its lowest point of 89%, is greater than the national average.

Literacy Rate

Year	Literacy rate
1951	47.18
1961	55.08
1971	69.75
1981	78.85
1991	89.81
2001	90.92
2011	93.91
2021	96.2
2025	95.31

Source: National Statistical Office (NSO)

Literacy Rate as Per 2011 Census

Rural Literacy rate	Urban Literacy rate
92.98%	95.10%

Literacy Rate of Male and Female

Gender	Rural	Urban
Male	95.36%	96.95%
Female	90.81%	93.43%

Enrolment in Kerala

Directed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the All-India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) examines several aspects of higher education across the country and in each of its individual states. Higher education is offered at various levels in Kerala. According to the AISHE final report for 2018-19, the following table shows the enrolment of students at different levels in Kerala.

Enrolment at Various Levels

Course Level	No of Enrolment
UG	641914
Diploma	63190
PG Diploma	507
Certificate	2912
Integrated	4877
PG	39907
M.Phil	565
PhD.	3599
Total Enrolment	757471

With an index score of 0.709 across all three measures of human development—health, education, and income—with and without inequality adjustment, Kerala stands alone among the nation's states. There is a close relationship between the three indicators of social development—the index of education, health, and per capita income. When health and education are improved, it leads to higher per capita income.

One can see how each of Kerala's districts stacks up in terms of per capita income, education level, and health

index in the chart below. The figure shows that among the three cities in Kerala, Ernakulam, Kottayam, and Thiruvananthapuram have the greatest per capita income. Kottayam is also at the top of the education index, with Parthanamthitta and Wayanad following closely behind. Idukki, Kottayam, and Thiruvananthapuram are the top three districts in terms of health care out of fourteen. The Malappuram District is the least developed in Kerala, ranking 33783 in per capita income, 0.772137 in education index, and 0.647 in health index.

SL.	Districts	Per-Capita Income	Education Index	Education Index
1	Thiruvananthapuram	57563	0.941539	1.222
2	Kollam	48795	0.924303	0.921
3	Pathanamthitta	56994	1.259546	0.928
4	Alappuzha	53535	0.978822	1.188
5	Kottayam	61668	1.39152	1.541
6	Idukki-	51367	1.187519	1.634
7	Ernakulam	79553	1.031705	0.997
8	Thrissur	56087	1.032621	1.032621
9	Palakkad	49825	0.966515	0.686
10	Malappuram	33783	0.772137	0.647
11	Kozhikode	50389	0.936743	0.854
12	Wayanadu	38341	1.122099	1.314
13	Kannur	50623	1.037223	0.759
14	Kasargod	44588	0.920151	1.364

Source: Census of India 2011

Education Summary of Kerala (2025–26)

- Total schools (all types): ~15,369
- Total students (all types): ~43.6 lakh
- Total teachers: ~1.65 lakh
- VHSE students: ~56,000
- VHSE teachers: ~5,945
- Government schools account for ~5,800 schools
- Aided schools: ~8,150
- Unaided recognised schools: ~1,406

The government's "Pothu Vidyabhyasa Samrakshana Yajnam" (Mission to Protect Public Education) includes educational sector development. This mission's projects seek to reform the state's public school system by providing all kids with a high-quality education that prepares them to compete globally. The mission's stated goal is to make higher education in Kerala free for all students and restore public faith in publicly funded institutions.

According to official statistics, 12,678 schools in the state now have access to high-speed, broadband Internet, and 3,74,274 pieces of IT equipment, including 1,19,055 laptops, 69,944 multimedia projectors, 23,098 projector screens, 4,545 LED TVs, 4,720 Full HD webcams, 4,611 multi-function printers, and 4,788 DSLR cameras.

Learning is approached differently. Students receive an opportunity to learn through hands-on involvement with

technology instead of just hearing about it in a classroom setting. Additionally, the education department guarantees that the quality of teachers in public schools is improved through ongoing workshops and trainings. Five lakh more children have registered in Kerala's public schools in the past three years, thanks to these improvements in facilities and educational quality. People used to talk about how government schools should be closed. However, things were looking up as the schools were getting better and drawing in more pupils. In an effort to revitalize public education, the government spent last year designating 90 schools as "Centers of Excellence" and practically constructing 54 new school buildings.

Additionally, substantial plans were put forward to investigate the post-COVID digital technology and innovation prospects, as well as to take advantage of the work-from-home culture. Kerala is actively working to achieve international standards in higher education, technical education, and research, and it is already well ahead of the national objectives in primary and secondary education. Contrary to its previous plans, the Twelfth Plan calls on the private sector to build better and bigger institutions. Additionally, it pledges to support innovative Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models in the academic sector.

Population (18 – 23 years) 2018 - 2019 In Kerala

All Categories			SC			ST		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1486785	1476319	2963104	134773	133546	268319	22592	23809	46401

Number of Universities during 2011-2019 in Kerala

2011-2012	2011-2013	2011-2014	2011-2015	2011-2016	2011-2017	2011-2018	2011-2019
17	17	18	18	20	21	22	23

College Indicators during 2011-2019 in Kerala

No. of Colleges							
2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
1033	1064	1151	1259	1302	1334	1306	1348

Estimated Enrolment in Colleges in Kerala

Post Graduate			Under Graduate		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
15782	55147	70929	262883	382284	645167

The education budget in Kerala has grown in recent years, thanks to increases in both direct funding and the practice of decentralization through various local authorities. Similarly, education spending per capita is going up. Sustainable human development can be achieved via early simulation, comprehensive interventions in nutrition, health, and sanitation, as shown in the Kerala model. In order to reach SDG4, member states are expected to allocate 4-6% of their GDP to education, according to the Incheon Declaration. This proclamation includes India as a signatory.

But it doesn't seem that way in the Union Budget. Education would receive a dismal 2.75 percent of GDP in the 2021 budget. It is reasonable to expect the state budget to give education a higher priority given its status on the Concurrent List. Money and revenue management aren't the only things that matter when it comes to allocation. As a result of structural inefficiencies, the expense of schooling is rising, and a growing number of children are being removed from the system at an early age, according to numerous reports and available data.

According to current trends and predictions in the higher education industry, the estimated number of students enrolled in colleges in Kerala for 2026 is around 11.4 to 12 lakh. With an anticipated enrolment of almost 3.5 lakh students in Arts and Science programs alone, the historic policy of fully free graduation for students in these fields at government and aided universities was adopted in the Kerala State Budget 2026-27.

Factors Influencing Enrolment in 2026 • Total Enrolment in Higher Education: In previous years, the state's total enrolment in higher education, including universities, has ranged between 11 lakh to 13.6 lakh. While access is high generally, specialists have noticed a spike in some areas, such as technical education, as of the year 2026. • Increase in Technical Education: The number of students enrolled at APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University has grown substantially, going from over 30,900 in 2021-22 to more than 49,100 in 2025-26, an increase of 72%. • Gender Parity: With a GPI of 1.44, Kerala is far and away the leader in terms of the percentage of female students compared to male students enrolled in higher education. The state's higher education gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 41.3%, significantly higher than the national average of 28.4%.

Considerations Affecting Enrolment in 2026

- 1. Free Graduation Policy:** To decrease Class 12 dropouts, government-aided schools' undergraduate degree programs will no longer charge tuition.
- 2. Curriculum Reforms:** To increase enrolment in technical and professional courses, new programs are being implemented, including as one-year internships

and skill development modules in partnership with NASSCOM.

- 3. School Pipeline:** With more than 4 lakh kids taking the Kerala SSLC (Class 10) examinations in 2026, there will be a consistent supply of qualified individuals for future university programs.
- 4. Challenges with Infrastructure:** Despite increasing enrolment, experts caution that many universities' labs and dormitories have not been able to keep up with the demand.

Conclusion

Education and health care in Kerala are on par with Western standards, which sets it apart from the rest of India and other low-income nations. More people at all socioeconomic levels have access to education and a bigger voice in government in Kerala than in any other Indian state, and women in general have it far better than in the rest of India. For a long time, the foundation of Kerala's much-lauded development successes has been the public supply of educational institutions. It is widely acknowledged that throughout Kerala's history, every political and social reform movement has advocated for the importance of education as a means to combat prejudice based on gender, class, and caste. Thanks to its early recognition of the need of "mass literacy required mass schooling," Kerala now boasts the world's highest literacy rate. As a result, Kerala blew away many other states in terms of human development indicators like literacy rates (especially among females), school enrolment, the proportion of female students and students from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes enrolled in school, the rate of student attrition, and the availability of education in rural areas. The availability of solid infrastructure, the social value of the society, and the effective role of the state have all contributed to the success story that is Kerala's education system. The state spent the most on public education in the country, with over 80% of that budget going toward school education (Frontline, 2011).

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